PLAYS BY ANTON TCHEKOFF

Uncle Vanya
Ivanoff
The Sea-Gull
The Swan Song

TRANSLATED BY
MARIAN FELL

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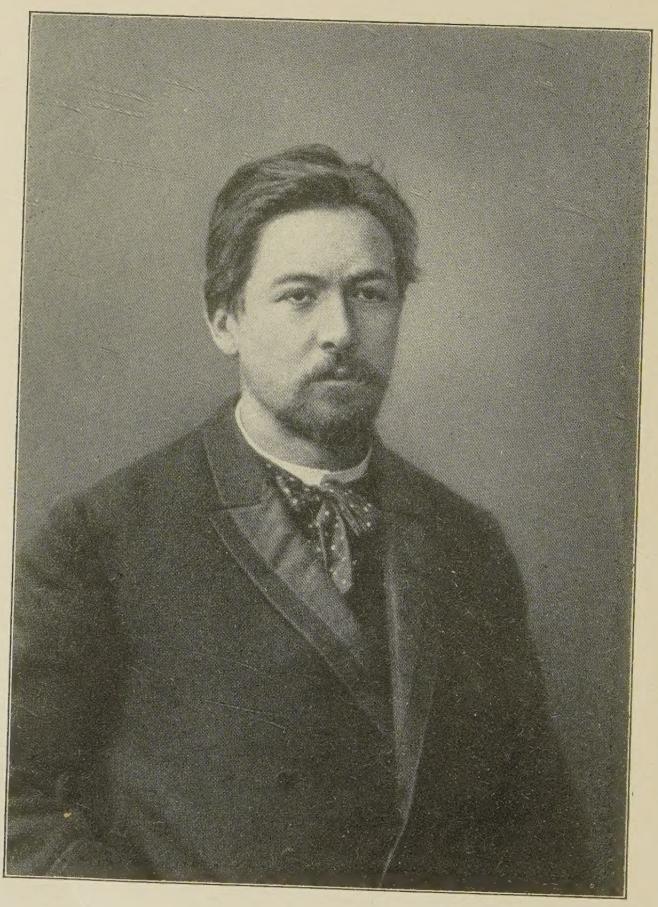

ANTON TCHEKOFF

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UNCLE VANYA
IVANOFF
THE SEA-GULL
THE SWAN SONG

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

MARIAN FELL

NEW YORK
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INTRODUCTION

ANTON TCHEKOFF

The last years of the nineteenth century were for Russia tinged with doubt and gloom. The high-tide of vitality that had risen during the Turkish war ebbed in the early eighties, leaving behind it a dead level of apathy which lasted until life was again quickened by the high interests of the Revolution. During these grey years the lonely country and stagnant provincial towns of Russia buried a peasantry which was enslaved by want and toil, and an educated upper class which was enslaved by idleness and tedium. Most of the "Intellectuals," with no outlet for their energies, were content to forget their ennui in vodka and card-playing; only the more idealistic gasped for air in the stifling atmosphere, crying out in despair against life as they saw it, and looking forward with a pathetic hope to happiness for humanity in "two or three hundred years." It is the inevitable tragedy of their existence, and the pitiful humour of their surroundings, that are portrayed with such insight and sympathy by Anton Tchekoff who is, perhaps, of modern writers, the dearest to the Russian people.

Anton Tchekoff was born in the old Black Sea port of Taganrog on January 17, 1860. His grandfather had been a serf; his father married a merchant's daughter and settled in Taganrog, where, during Anton's boyhood, he carried on a small and unsuccessful trade in provisions. The young Tchekoff was soon impressed into the services of the large, poverty-stricken family, and he spoke regretfully in after years of his hard-worked childhood. But he was obedient

and good-natured, and worked cheerfully in his father's shop, closely observing the idlers that assembled there, and gathering the drollest stories, which he would afterward whisper in class to his laughing schoolfellows. Many were the punishments which he incurred by this habit, which was incorrigible.

His grandfather had now become manager of an estate near Taganrog, in the wild steppe country of the Don Cossacks, and here the boy spent his summers, fishing in the river, and roving about the countryside as brown as a gipsy, sowing the seeds of that love for nature which he retained all his life. His evenings he liked best to spend in the kitchen of the master's house among the work people and peasants who gathered there, taking part in their games, and setting them all laughing by his witty and telling observations.

When Tchekoff was about fourteen, his father moved the family to Moscow, leaving Anton in Taganrog, and now, relieved of work in the shop, his progress at school became remarkable. At seventeen he wrote a long tragedy, which was afterward destroyed, and he already showed flashes of the wit that was soon to blaze into genius.

He graduated from the high school at Taganrog with every honour, entered the University of Moscow as a student of medicine, and threw himself headlong into a double life of student and author, in the attempt to help his struggling family.

His first story appeared in a Moscow paper in 1880, and after some difficulty he secured a position connected with several of the smaller periodicals, for which, during his student years, he poured forth a succession of short stories and sketches of Russian life with incredible rapidity. He wrote, he tells us, during every spare minute, in crowded rooms where there was "no light and less air," and never spent

more than a day on any one story. He also wrote at this time a very stirring blood-and-thunder play which was suppressed by the censor, and the fate of which is not known.

His audience demanded laughter above all things, and, with his deep sense of the ridiculous, Tchekoff asked nothing better. His stories, though often based on themes profoundly tragic, are penetrated by the light and subtle satire that has won him his reputation as a great humourist. But though there was always a smile on his lips, it was a tender one, and his sympathy with suffering often brought his laughter near to tears.

This delicate and original genius was at first subjected to harsh criticism, which Tchekoff felt keenly, and Trigorin's description in "The Sea-Gull" of the trials of a young author is a cry from Tchekoff's own soul. A passionate enemy of all lies and oppression, he already foreshadows in these early writings the protest against conventions and rules, which he afterward put into *Treplieff's* reply to *Sorin* in "The Sea-Gull": "Let us have new forms, or else nothing at all."

In 1884 he took his degree as doctor of medicine, and decided to practise, although his writing had by now taken on a professional character. He always gave his calling a high place, and the doctors in his works are drawn with affection and understanding. If any one spoke slightingly of doctors in his presence, he would exclaim: "Stop! You don't know what country doctors do for the people!"

Tchekoff fully realised later the influence which his profession had exercised on his literary work, and sometimes regretted the too vivid insight it gave him, but, on the other hand, he was able to write: "Only a doctor can know what value my knowledge of science has been to me," and "It seems to me that as a doctor I have described the sicknesses of the soul correctly." For instance, *Trigorin's* analysis in "The

Sea-Gull" of the state of mind of an author has well been called "artistic diagnosis."

The young doctor-writer is described at this time as modest and grave, with flashes of brilliant gaiety. A son of the people, there was in his face an expression that recalled the simple-hearted village lad; his eyes were blue, his glance full of intelligence and kindness, and his manners unaffected and simple. He was an untiring worker, and between his patients and his desk he led a life of ceaseless activity. His restless mind was dominated by a passion of energy and he thought continually and vividly. Often, while jesting and talking, he would seem suddenly to plunge into himself, and his look would grow fixed and deep, as if he were contemplating something important and strange. Then he would ask some unexpected question, which showed how far his mind had roamed.

Success was now rapidly overtaking the young author; his first collection of stories appeared in 1887, another one in the same year had immediate success, and both went through many editions; but, at the same time, the shadows that darkened his later works began to creep over his light-hearted humour.

His impressionable mind began to take on the grey tinge of his time, but much of his sadness may also be attributed to his ever-increasing ill health.

Weary and with an obstinate cough, he went south in 1888, took a little cottage on the banks of a little river "abounding in fish and crabs," and surrendered himself to his touching love for nature, happy in his passion for fishing, in the quiet of the country, and in the music and gaiety of the peasants. "One would gladly sell one's soul," he writes, "for the pleasure of seeing the warm evening sky, and the streams and pools reflecting the darkly mournful sunset." He de-

scribed visits to his country neighbours and long drives in gay company, during which, he says, "we ate every half hour, and laughed to the verge of colic."

His health, however, did not improve. In 1889 he began to have attacks of heart trouble, and the sensitive artist's nature appears in a remark which he made after one of them. "I walked quickly across the terrace on which the guests were assembled," he said, "with one idea in my mind, how awkward it would be to fall down and die in the presence of strangers."

It was during this transition period of his life, when his youthful spirits were failing him, that the stage, for which he had always felt a fascination, tempted him to write "Ivanoff," and also a dramatic sketch in one act entitled "The Swan Song," though he often declared that he had no ambition to become a dramatist. "The Novel," he wrote, "is a lawful wife, but the Stage is a noisy, flashy, and insolent mistress." He has put his opinion of the stage of his day in the mouth of *Treplieff*, in "The Sea-Gull," and he often refers to it in his letters as "an evil disease of the towns" and "the gallows on which dramatists are hanged."

He wrote "Ivanoff" at white-heat in two and a half weeks, as a protest against a play he had seen at one of the Moscow theatres. *Ivanoff* (from Ivan, the commonest of Russian names) was by no means meant to be a hero, but a most ordinary, weak man oppressed by the "immortal commonplaces of life," with his heart and soul aching in the grip of circumstance, one of the many "useless people" of Russia for whose sorrow Tchekoff felt such overwhelming pity. He saw nothing in their lives that could not be explained and pardoned, and he returns to his ill-fated, "useless people" again and again, not to preach any doctrine of pessimism,

but simply because he thought that the world was the better for a certain fragile beauty of their natures and their touching faith in the ultimate salvation of humanity.

Both the writing and staging of "Ivanoff" gave Tchekoff great difficulty. The characters all being of almost equal importance, he found it hard to get enough good actors to take the parts, but it finally appeared in Moscow in 1889, a decided failure! The author had touched sharply several sensitive spots of Russian life—for instance, in his warning not to marry a Jewess or a blue-stocking—and the play was also marred by faults of inexperience, which, however, he later corrected. The critics were divided in condemning a certain novelty in it and in praising its freshness and originality. The character of *Ivanoff* was not understood, and the weakness of the man blinded many to the lifelike portrait. Tchekoff himself was far from pleased with what he called his "literary abortion," and rewrote it before it was produced again in St. Petersburg. Here it was received with the wildest applause, and the morning after its performance the papers burst into unanimous praise. The author was enthusiastically fêted, but the burden of his growing fame was beginning to be very irksome to him, and he wrote wearily at this time that he longed to be in the country, fishing in the lake, or lying in the hay.

His next play to appear was a farce entitled "The Boor," which he wrote in a single evening and which had a great success. This was followed by "The Demon," a failure, rewritten ten years later as "Uncle Vanya."

All Russia now combined in urging Tchekoff to write some important work, and this, too, was the writer's dream; but his only long story is "The Steppe," which is, after all, but a series of sketches, exquisitely drawn, and strung together on the slenderest connecting thread. Tchekoff's delicate and

elusive descriptive power did not lend itself to painting on a large canvas, and his strange little tragi-comedies of Russian life, his "Tedious Tales," as he called them, were always to remain his masterpieces.

In 1890 Tchekoff made a journey to the Island of Saghalien, after which his health definitely failed, and the consumption, with which he had long been threatened, finally declared itself. His illness exiled him to the Crimea, and he spent his last ten years there, making frequent trips to Moscow to superintend the production of his four important plays, written during this period of his life.

"The Sea-Gull" appeared in 1896, and, after a failure in St. Petersburg, won instant success as soon as it was given on the stage of the Artists' Theatre in Moscow. Of all Tchekoff's plays, this one conforms most nearly to our Western conventions, and is therefore most easily appreciated here. In *Trigorin* the author gives us one of the rare glimpses of his own mind, for Tchekoff seldom put his own personality into the pictures of the life in which he took such immense interest.

In "The Sea-Gull" we see clearly the increase of Tchekoff's power of analysis, which is remarkable in his next play, "The Three Sisters," gloomiest of all his dramas.

"The Three Sisters," produced in 1901, depends, even more than most of Tchekoff's plays, on its interpretation, and it is almost essential to its appreciation that it should be seen rather than read. The atmosphere of gloom with which it is pervaded is a thousand times more intense when it comes to us across the foot-lights. In it Tchekoff probes the depths of human life with so sure a touch, and lights them with an insight so piercing, that the play made a deep impression when it appeared. This was also partly owing to the masterly way in which it was acted at the Artists' Theatre in

Moscow. The theme is, as usual, the greyness of provincial life, and the night is lit for his little group of characters by a flash of passion so intense that the darkness which succeeds it seems wellnigh intolerable.

"Uncle Vanya" followed "The Three Sisters," and the poignant truth of the picture, together with the tender beauty of the last scene, touched his audience profoundly, both on the stage and when the play was afterward published.

"The Cherry Orchard" appeared in 1904 and was Tchekoff's last play. At its production, just before his death, the author was fêted as one of Russia's greatest dramatists. Here it is not only country life that Tchekhoff shows us, but Russian life and character in general, in which the old order is giving place to the new, and we see the practical, modern spirit invading the vague, aimless existence so dear to the owners of the cherry orchard. A new epoch was beginning, and at its dawn the singer of old, dim Russia was silenced.

In the year that saw the production of "The Cherry Orchard," Tchekoff, the favourite of the Russian people, whom Tolstoi declared to be comparable as a writer of stories only to Maupassant, died suddenly in a little village of the Black Forest, whither he had gone a few weeks before in the hope of recovering his lost health.

Tchekoff, with an art peculiar to himself, in scattered scenes, in haphazard glimpses into the lives of his characters, in seemingly trivial conversations, has succeeded in so concentrating the atmosphere of the Russia of his day that we feel it in every line we read, oppressive as the mists that hang over a lake at dawn, and, like those mists, made visible to us by the light of an approaching day.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF ANTON TCHEKOFF

PLAYS

"The Swan Song"	1889
"The Proposal"	1889
"Ivanoff"	1889
"The Boor"	1890
"The Sea-Gull"	1896
"The Tragedian in Spite of Himself"	1899
"The Three Sisters"	1901
"Uncle Vanya"	1902
"The Cherry Orchard"	1904

NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES

"Humorous Folk"	1887
"Twilight, and Other Stories"	1887
"Morose Folk"	1890
"Variegated Tales"	1894
"Old Wives of Russia"	1894
"The Duel"	1895
"The Chestnut Tree"	1895
"Ward Number Six"	1897

MISCELLANEOUS SKETCHES

"The Island of Saghalien"	1895
"Peasants"	1898
"Life in the Provinces"	1898
"Children"	1899

UNCLE VANYA

SCENES FROM COUNTRY LIFE

In Four Acts

CHARACTERS

Alexander Serebrakoff, *a retired professor*
Helena, *his wife, twenty-seven years old*
Sonia, *his daughter by a former marriage*
Mme. Voitskaya, *widow of a privy councilor, and mother of Serebrakoff's first wife*
Ivan (Vanya) Voitski, *her son*
Michael Astroff, *a doctor*
Ilia (Waffles) Telegin, *an impoverished landowner*
Marina, *an old nurse*
A Workman

The scene is laid on Serebrakoff's *country place*

UNCLE VANYA

ACT I

A country house on a terrace. In front of it a garden. In an avenue of trees, under an old poplar, stands a table set for tea, with a samovar, etc. Some benches and chairs stand near the table. On one of them is lying a guitar. A hammock is swung near the table. It is three o'clock in the afternoon of a cloudy day.

MARINA, *a quiet, grey-haired, little old woman, is sitting at the table knitting a stocking.*

ASTROFF *is walking up and down near her.*

MARINA. [*Pouring some tea into a glass*] Take a little tea, my son.

ASTROFF. [*Takes the glass from her unwillingly*] Somehow, I don't seem to want any.

MARINA. Then will you have a little vodka instead?

ASTROFF. No, I don't drink vodka every day, and besides, it is too hot now. [*A pause*] Tell me, nurse, how long have we known each other?

MARINA. [*Thoughtfully*] Let me see, how long is it? Lord —help me to remember. You first came here, into our parts—let me think—when was it? Sonia's mother was still alive—it was two winters before she died; that was eleven years ago—[*thoughtfully*] perhaps more.

ASTROFF. Have I changed much since then?

MARINA. Oh, yes. You were handsome and young then, and now you are an old man and not handsome any more. You drink, too.

ASTROFF. Yes, ten years have made me another man. And why? Because I am overworked. Nurse, I am on my feet from dawn till dusk. I know no rest; at night I tremble under my blankets for fear of being dragged out to visit some one who is sick; I have toiled without repose or a day's freedom since I have known you; could I help growing old? And then, existence is tedious, anyway; it is a senseless, dirty business, this life, and goes heavily. Every one about here is silly, and after living with them for two or three years one grows silly oneself. It is inevitable. [*Twisting his moustache*] See what a long moustache I have grown. A foolish, long moustache. Yes, I am as silly as the rest, nurse, but not as stupid; no, I have not grown stupid. Thank God, my brain is not addled yet, though my feelings have grown numb. I ask nothing, I need nothing, I love no one, unless it is yourself alone. [*He kisses her head*] I had a nurse just like you when I was a child.

MARINA. Don't you want a bite of something to eat?

ASTROFF. No. During the third week of Lent I went to the epidemic at Malitskoi. It was eruptive typhoid. The peasants were all lying side by side in their huts, and the calves and pigs were running about the floor among the sick. Such dirt there was, and smoke! Unspeakable! I slaved among those people all day, not a crumb passed my lips, but when I got home there was still no rest for me; a switchman was carried in from the railroad; I laid him on the operating table and he went and died in my arms under chloroform, and then my feelings that should have been deadened awoke again, my conscience tortured me as if I had killed the man. I sat down and closed my eyes—like this—and thought: will our descendants two hundred years from now, for whom we are breaking the road, remember to give us a kind word? No, nurse, they will forget.

MARINA. Man is forgetful, but God remembers.

ASTROFF. Thank you for that. You have spoken the truth.

Enter VOITSKI *from the house. He has been asleep after dinner and looks rather dishevelled. He sits down on the bench and straightens his collar.*

VOITSKI. H'm. Yes. [*A pause*] Yes.

ASTROFF. Have you been asleep?

VOITSKI. Yes, very much so. [*He yawns*] Ever since the Professor and his wife have come, our daily life seems to have jumped the track. I sleep at the wrong time, drink wine, and eat all sorts of messes for luncheon and dinner. It isn't wholesome. Sonia and I used to work together and never had an idle moment, but now Sonia works alone and I only eat and drink and sleep. Something is wrong.

MARINA. [*Shaking her head*] Such a confusion in the house! The Professor gets up at twelve, the samovar is kept boiling all the morning, and everything has to wait for him. Before they came we used to have dinner at one o'clock, like everybody else, but now we have it at seven. The Professor sits up all night writing and reading, and suddenly, at two o'clock, there goes the bell! Heavens, what is that? The Professor wants some tea! Wake the servants, light the samovar! Lord, what disorder!

ASTROFF. Will they be here long?

VOITSKI. A hundred years! The Professor has decided to make his home here.

MARINA. Look at this now! The samovar has been on the table for two hours, and they are all out walking!

VOITSKI. All right, don't get excited; here they come.

Voices are heard approaching. SEREBRAKOFF, HELENA, SONIA, *and* TELEGIN *come in from the depths of the garden, returning from their walk.*

SEREBRAKOFF. Superb! Superb! What beautiful views!

TELEGIN. They are wonderful, your Excellency.

SONIA. To-morrow we shall go into the woods, shall we, papa?

VOITSKI. Ladies and gentlemen, tea is ready.

SEREBRAKOFF. Won't you please be good enough to send my tea into the library? I still have some work to finish.

SONIA. I am sure you will love the woods.

HELENA, SEREBRAKOFF, *and* SONIA *go into the house.* TELEGIN *sits down at the table beside* MARINA.

VOITSKI. There goes our learned scholar on a hot, sultry day like this, in his overcoat and goloshes and carrying an umbrella!

ASTROFF. He is trying to take good care of his health.

VOITSKI. How lovely she is! How lovely! I have never in my life seen a more beautiful woman.

TELEGIN. Do you know, Marina, that as I walk in the fields or in the shady garden, as I look at this table here, my heart swells with unbounded happiness. The weather is enchanting, the birds are singing, we are all living in peace and contentment—what more could the soul desire?

[*Takes a glass of tea.*

VOITSKI. [*Dreaming*] Such eyes—a glorious woman!

ASTROFF. Come, Ivan, tell us something.

VOITSKI. [*Indolently*] What shall I tell you?

ASTROFF. Haven't you any news for us?

VOITSKI. No, it is all stale. I am just the same as usual, or perhaps worse, because I have become lazy. I don't do anything now but croak like an old raven. My mother, the old magpie, is still chattering about the emancipation of woman, with one eye on her grave and the other on her learned books, in which she is always looking for the dawn of a new life.

ASTROFF. And the Professor?

VOITSKI. The Professor sits in his library from morning till night, as usual—

> "Straining the mind, wrinkling the brow,
> We write, write, write,
> Without respite
> Or hope of praise in the future or now."

Poor paper! He ought to write his autobiography; he would make a really splendid subject for a book! Imagine it, the life of a retired professor, as stale as a piece of hardtack, tortured by gout, headaches, and rheumatism, his liver bursting with jealousy and envy, living on the estate of his first wife, although he hates it, because he can't afford to live in town. He is everlastingly whining about his hard lot, though, as a matter of fact, he is extraordinarily lucky. He is the son of a common deacon and has attained the professor's chair, become the son-in-law of a senator, is called "your Excellency," and so on. But I'll tell you something; the man has been writing on art for twenty-five years, and he doesn't know the very first thing about it. For twenty-five years he has been chewing on other men's thoughts about realism, naturalism, and all such foolishness; for twenty-five years he has been reading and writing things that clever men have long known and stupid ones are not interested in; for twenty-five years he has been making his imaginary mountains out of molehills. And just think of the man's self-conceit and presumption all this time! For twenty-five years he has been masquerading in false clothes and has now retired, absolutely unknown to any living soul; and yet see him! stalking across the earth like a demi-god!

ASTROFF. I believe you envy him.

VOITSKI. Yes, I do. Look at the success he has had with

women! Don Juan himself was not more favoured. His first wife, who was my sister, was a beautiful, gentle being, as pure as the blue heaven there above us, noble, great-hearted, with more admirers than he has pupils, and she loved him as only beings of angelic purity can love those who are as pure and beautiful as themselves. His mother-in-law, my mother, adores him to this day, and he still inspires a sort of worshipful awe in her. His second wife is, as you see, a brilliant beauty; she married him in his old age and has surrendered all the glory of her beauty and freedom to him. Why? What for?

ASTROFF. Is she faithful to him?

VOITSKI. Yes, unfortunately she is.

ASTROFF. Why "unfortunately"?

VOITSKI. Because such fidelity is false and unnatural, root and branch. It sounds well, but there is no logic in it. It is thought immoral for a woman to deceive an old husband whom she hates, but quite moral for her to strangle her poor youth in her breast and banish every vital desire from her heart.

TELEGIN. [*In a tearful voice*] Vanya, I don't like to hear you talk so. Listen, Vanya; every one who betrays husband or wife is faithless, and could also betray his country.

VOITSKI. [*Crossly*] Turn off the tap, Waffles.

TELEGIN. No, allow me, Vanya. My wife ran away with a lover on the day after our wedding, because my exterior was unprepossessing. I have never failed in my duty since then. I love her and am true to her to this day. I help her all I can and have given my fortune to educate the daughter of herself and her lover. I have forfeited my happiness, but I have kept my pride. And she? Her youth has fled, her beauty has faded according to the laws of nature, and her lover is dead. What has she kept?

HELENA *and* SONIA *come in; after them comes* MME. VOITSKAYA *carrying a book. She sits down and begins to read. Some one hands her a glass of tea which she drinks without looking up.*

SONIA. [*Hurriedly, to the nurse*] There are some peasants waiting out there. Go and see what they want. I shall pour the tea. [*Pours out some glasses of tea.*

MARINA *goes out.* HELENA *takes a glass and sits drinking in the hammock.*

ASTROFF. I have come to see your husband. You wrote me that he had rheumatism and I know not what else, and that he was very ill, but he appears to be as lively as a cricket.

HELENA. He had a fit of the blues yesterday evening and complained of pains in his legs, but he seems all right again to-day.

ASTROFF. And I galloped over here twenty miles at breakneck speed! No matter, though, it is not the first time. Once here, however, I am going to stay until to-morrow, and at any rate sleep *quantum satis.*

SONIA. Oh, splendid! You so seldom spend the night with us. Have you had dinner yet?

ASTROFF. No.

SONIA. Good. So you will have it with us. We dine at seven now. [*Drinks her tea*] This tea is cold!

TELEGIN. Yes, the samovar has grown cold.

HELENA. Don't mind, Monsieur Ivan, we will drink cold tea, then.

TELEGIN. I beg your pardon, my name is not Ivan, but Ilia, ma'am—Ilia Telegin, or Waffles, as I am sometimes called on account of my pock-marked face. I am Sonia's godfather, and his Excellency, your husband, knows me very well. I now live with you, ma'am, on this estate, and per-

haps you will be so good as to notice that I dine with you every day.

SONIA. He is our great help, our right-hand man. [*Tenderly*] Dear godfather, let me pour you some tea.

MME. VOITSKAYA. Oh! Oh!

SONIA. What is it, grandmother?

MME. VOITSKAYA. I forgot to tell Alexander—I have lost my memory—I received a letter to-day from Paul Alexevitch in Kharkoff. He has sent me a new pamphlet.

ASTROFF. Is it interesting?

MME. VOITSKAYA. Yes, but strange. He refutes the very theories which he defended seven years ago. It is appalling!

VOITSKI. There is nothing appalling about it. Drink your tea, mamma.

MME. VOITSKAYA. It seems you never want to listen to what I have to say. Pardon me, Jean, but you have changed so in the last year that I hardly know you. You used to be a man of settled convictions and had an illuminating personality——

VOITSKI. Oh, yes. I had an illuminating personality, which illuminated no one. [*A pause*] I had an illuminating personality! You couldn't say anything more biting. I am forty-seven years old. Until last year I endeavoured, as you do now, to blind my eyes by your pedantry to the truths of life. But now— Oh, if you only knew! If you knew how I lie awake at night, heartsick and angry, to think how stupidly I have wasted my time when I might have been winning from life everything which my old age now forbids.

SONIA. Uncle Vanya, how dreary!

MME. VOITSKAYA. [*To her son*] You speak as if your former convictions were somehow to blame, but you yourself, not they, were at fault. You have forgotten that a conviction,

in itself, is nothing but a dead letter. You should have done something.

VOITSKI. Done something! Not every man is capable of being a writer *perpetuum mobile* like your Herr Professor.

MME. VOITSKAYA. What do you mean by that?

SONIA. [*Imploringly*] Mother! Uncle Vanya! I entreat you!

VOITSKI. I am silent. I apologise and am silent. [*A pause.*

HELENA. What a fine day! Not too hot. [*A pause.*

VOITSKI. A fine day to hang oneself.

TELEGIN *tunes the guitar.* MARINA *appears near the house, calling the chickens.*

MARINA. Chick, chick, chick!

SONIA. What did the peasants want, nurse?

MARINA. The same old thing, the same old nonsense. Chick, chick, chick!

SONIA. Why are you calling the chickens?

MARINA. The speckled hen has disappeared with her chicks. I am afraid the crows have got her.

TELEGIN *plays a polka. All listen in silence. Enter* WORKMAN.

WORKMAN. Is the doctor here? [*To* ASTROFF] Excuse me, sir, but I have been sent to fetch you.

ASTROFF. Where are you from?

WORKMAN. The factory.

ASTROFF. [*Annoyed*] Thank you. There is nothing for it, then, but to go. [*Looking around him for his cap*] Damn it, this is annoying!

SONIA. Yes, it is too bad, really. You must come back to dinner from the factory.

ASTROFF. No, I won't be able to do that. It will be too late. Now where, where— [*To the* WORKMAN] Look here, my man, get me a glass of vodka, will you? [*The* WORKMAN

goes out] Where—where— [*Finds his cap*] One of the characters in Ostroff's plays is a man with a long moustache and short wits, like me. However, let me bid you good-bye, ladies and gentlemen. [*To* HELENA] I should be really delighted if you would come to see me some day with Miss Sonia. My estate is small, but if you are interested in such things I should like to show you a nursery and seed-bed whose like you will not find within a thousand miles of here. My place is surrounded by government forests. The forester is old and always ailing, so I superintend almost all the work myself.

HELENA. I have always heard that you were very fond of the woods. Of course one can do a great deal of good by helping to preserve them, but does not that work interfere with your real calling?

ASTROFF. God alone knows what a man's real calling is.

HELENA. And do you find it interesting?

ASTROFF. Yes, very.

VOITSKI. [*Sarcastically*] Oh, extremely!

HELENA. You are still young, not over thirty-six or seven, I should say, and I suspect that the woods do not interest you as much as you say they do. I should think you would find them monotonous.

SONIA. No, the work is thrilling. Dr. Astroff watches over the old woods and sets out new plantations every year, and he has already received a diploma and a bronze medal. If you will listen to what he can tell you, you will agree with him entirely. He says that forests are the ornaments of the earth, that they teach mankind to understand beauty and attune his mind to lofty sentiments. Forests temper a stern climate, and in countries where the climate is milder, less strength is wasted in the battle with nature, and the people are kind and gentle. The inhabitants of such countries are

handsome, tractable, sensitive, graceful in speech and gesture. Their philosophy is joyous, art and science blossom among them, their treatment of women is full of exquisite nobility——

VOITSKI. [*Laughing*] Bravo! Bravo! All that is very pretty, but it is also unconvincing. So, my friend [*To* ASTROFF] you must let me go on burning firewood in my stoves and building my sheds of planks.

ASTROFF. You can burn peat in your stoves and build your sheds of stone. Oh, I don't object, of course, to cutting wood from necessity, but why destroy the forests? The woods of Russia are trembling under the blows of the axe. Millions of trees have perished. The homes of the wild animals and birds have been desolated; the rivers are shrinking, and many beautiful landscapes are gone forever. And why? Because men are too lazy and stupid to stoop down and pick up their fuel from the ground. [*To* HELENA] Am I not right, Madame? Who but a stupid barbarian could burn so much beauty in his stove and destroy that which he cannot make? Man is endowed with reason and the power to create, so that he may increase that which has been given him, but until now he has not created, but demolished. The forests are disappearing, the rivers are running dry, the game is exterminated, the climate is spoiled, and the earth becomes poorer and uglier every day. [*To* VOITSKI] I read irony in your eye; you do not take what I am saying seriously, and—and—after all, it may very well be nonsense. But when I pass peasant-forests that I have preserved from the axe, or hear the rustling of the young plantations set out with my own hands, I feel as if I had had some small share in improving the climate, and that if mankind is happy a thousand years from now I will have been a little bit responsible for their happiness. When I plant a little birch

tree and then see it budding into young green and swaying in the wind, my heart swells with pride and I— [*Sees the* WORKMAN, *who is bringing him a glass of vodka on a tray*] however— [*He drinks*] I must be off. Probably it is all nonsense, anyway. Good-bye.

He goes toward the house. SONIA *takes his arm and goes with him.*

SONIA. When are you coming to see us again?

ASTROFF. I can't say.

SONIA. In a month?

ASTROFF *and* SONIA *go into the house.* HELENA *and* VOITSKI *walk over to the terrace.*

HELENA. You have behaved shockingly again. Ivan, what sense was there in teasing your mother and talking about *perpetuum mobile?* And at breakfast you quarreled with Alexander again. Really, your behaviour is too petty.

VOITSKI. But if I hate him?

HELENA. You hate Alexander without reason; he is like every one else, and no worse than you are.

VOITSKI. If you could only see your face, your gestures! Oh, how tedious your life must be.

HELENA. It is tedious, yes, and dreary! You all abuse my husband and look on me with compassion; you think, "Poor woman, she is married to an old man." How well I understand your compassion! As Astroff said just now, see how you thoughtlessly destroy the forests, so that there will soon be none left. So you also destroy mankind, and soon fidelity and purity and self-sacrifice will have vanished with the woods. Why cannot you look calmly at a woman unless she is yours? Because, the doctor was right, you are all possessed by a devil of destruction; you have no mercy on the woods or the birds or on women or on one another.

VOITSKI. I don't like your philosophy.

HELENA. That doctor has a sensitive, weary face—an interesting face. Sonia evidently likes him, and she is in love with him, and I can understand it. This is the third time he has been here since I have come, and I have not had a real talk with him yet or made much of him. He thinks I am disagreeable. Do you know, Ivan, the reason you and I are such friends? I think it is because we are both lonely and unfortunate. Yes, unfortunate. Don't look at me in that way, I don't like it.

VOITSKI. How can I look at you otherwise when I love you? You are my joy, my life, and my youth. I know that my chances of being loved in return are infinitely small, do not exist, but I ask nothing of you. Only let me look at you, listen to your voice——

HELENA. Hush, some one will overhear you.

[*They go toward the house.*

VOITSKI. [*Following her*] Let me speak to you of my love, do not drive me away, and this alone will be my greatest happiness!

HELENA. Ah! This is agony!

TELEGIN *strikes the strings of his guitar and plays a polka.* MME. VOITSKAYA *writes something on the leaves of her pamphlet.*

The curtain falls.

ACT II

The dining-room of SEREBRAKOFF'S *house. It is night. The tapping of the* WATCHMAN'S *rattle is heard in the garden.* SEREBRAKOFF *is dozing in an arm-chair by an open window and* HELENA *is sitting beside him, also half asleep.*

SEREBRAKOFF. [*Rousing himself*] Who is here? Is it you, Sonia?

HELENA. It is I.

SEREBRAKOFF. Oh, it is you, Nelly. This pain is intolerable.

HELENA. Your shawl has slipped down. [*She wraps up his legs in the shawl*] Let me shut the window.

SEREBRÁKOFF. No, leave it open; I am suffocating. I dreamt just now that my left leg belonged to some one else, and it hurt so that I woke. I don't believe this is gout, it is more like rheumatism. What time is it?

HELENA. Half past twelve. [*A pause.*

SEREBRAKOFF. I want you to look for Batushka's works in the library to-morrow. I think we have him.

HELENA. What is that?

SEREBRAKOFF. Look for Batushka to-morrow morning; we used to have him, I remember. Why do I find it so hard to breathe?

HELENA. You are tired; this is the second night you have had no sleep.

SEREBRAKOFF. They say that Turgenieff got angina of the heart from gout. I am afraid I am getting angina too. Oh, damn this horrible, accursed old age! Ever since I have

been old I have been hateful to myself, and I am sure, hateful to you all as well.

HELENA. You speak as if we were to blame for your being old.

SEREBRÁKOFF. I am more hateful to you than to any one.

HELENA *gets up and walks away from him, sitting down at a distance.*

SEREBRAKOFF. You are quite right, of course. I am not an idiot; I can understand you. You are young and healthy and beautiful, and longing for life, and I am an old dotard, almost a dead man already. Don't I know it? Of course I see that it is foolish for me to live so long, but wait! I shall soon set you all free. My life cannot drag on much longer.

HELENA. You are overtaxing my powers of endurance. Be quiet, for God's sake!

SEREBRAKOFF. It appears that, thanks to me, everybody's power of endurance is being overtaxed; everybody is miserable, only I am blissfully triumphant. Oh, yes, of course!

HELENA. Be quiet! You are torturing me.

SEREBRAKOFF. I torture everybody. Of course.

HELENA. [*Weeping*] This is unbearable! Tell me, what is it you want me to do?

SEREBRÁKOFF. Nothing.

HELENA. Then be quiet, please.

SEREBRAKOFF. It is funny that everybody listens to Ivan and his old idiot of a mother, but the moment I open my lips you all begin to feel ill-treated. You can't even stand the sound of my voice. Even if I am hateful, even if I am a selfish tyrant, haven't I the right to be one at my age? Haven't I deserved it? Haven't I, I ask you, the right to be respected, now that I am old?

HELENA. No one is disputing your rights. [*The window slams in the wind*] The wind is rising, I must shut the window.

[*She shuts it*] We shall have rain in a moment. Your rights have never been questioned by anybody.

The WATCHMAN *in the garden sounds his rattle.*

SEREBRAKOFF. I have spent my life working in the interests of learning. I am used to my library and the lecture hall and to the esteem and admiration of my colleagues. Now I suddenly find myself plunged in this wilderness, condemned to see the same stupid people from morning till night and listen to their futile conversation. I want to live; I long for success and fame and the stir of the world, and here I am in exile! Oh, it is dreadful to spend every moment grieving for the lost past, to see the success of others and sit here with nothing to do but to fear death. I cannot stand it! It is more than I can bear. And you will not even forgive me for being old!

HELENA. Wait, have patience; I shall be old myself in four or five years.

SONIA *comes in.*

SONIA. Father, you sent for Dr. Astroff, and now when he comes you refuse to see him. It is not nice to give a man so much trouble for nothing.

SEREBRAKOFF. What do I care about your Astroff? He understands medicine about as well as I understand astronomy.

SONIA. We can't send for the whole medical faculty, can we, to treat your gout?

SEREBRAKOFF. I won't talk to that madman!

SONIA. Do as you please. It's all the same to me.

[*She sits down.*

SEREBRAKOFF. What time is it?

HELENA. One o'clock.

SEREBRAKOFF. It is stifling in here. Sonia, hand me that bottle on the table.

SONIA. Here it is. [*She hands him a bottle of medicine.*

SEREBRAKOFF. [*Crossly*] No, not that one! Can't you understand me? Can't I ask you to do a thing?

SONIA. Please don't be captious with me. Some people may like it, but you must spare me, if you please, because I don't. Besides, I haven't the time; we are cutting the hay to-morrow and I must get up early.

VOITSKI *comes in dressed in a long gown and carrying a candle.*

VOITSKI. A thunderstorm is coming up. [*The lightning flashes*] There it is! Go to bed, Helena and Sonia. I have come to take your place.

SEREBRAKOFF. [*Frightened*] No, no, no! Don't leave me alone with him! Oh, don't. He will begin to lecture me.

VOITSKI. But you must give them a little rest. They have not slept for two nights.

SEREBRAKOFF. Then let them go to bed, but you go away too! Thank you. I implore you to go. For the sake of our former friendship do not protest against going. We will talk some other time——

VOITSKI. Our former friendship! Our former——

SONIA. Hush, Uncle Vanya!

SEREBRAKOFF. [*To his wife*] My darling, don't leave me alone with him. He will begin to lecture me.

VOITSKI. This is ridiculous.

MARINA *comes in carrying a candle.*

SONIA. You must go to bed, nurse, it is late.

MARINA. I haven't cleared away the tea things. Can't go to bed yet.

SEREBRAKOFF. No one can go to bed. They are all worn out, only I enjoy perfect happiness.

MARINA. [*Goes up to* SEREBRAKOFF *and speaks tenderly*] What's the matter, master? Does it hurt? My own legs

are aching too, oh, so badly. [*Arranges his shawl about his legs*] You have had this illness such a long time. Sonia's dead mother used to stay awake with you too, and wear herself out for you. She loved you dearly. [*A pause*] Old people want to be pitied as much as young ones, but nobody cares about them somehow. [*She kisses* SEREBRAKOFF'S *shoulder*] Come, master, let me give you some linden-tea and warm your poor feet for you. I shall pray to God for you.

SEREBRAKOFF. [*Touched*] Let us go, Marina.

MARINA. My own feet are aching so badly, oh, so badly! [*She and* SONIA *lead* SEREBRAKOFF *out*] Sonia's mother used to wear herself out with sorrow and weeping. You were still little and foolish then, Sonia. Come, come, master.

SEREBRAKOFF, SONIA *and* MARINA *go out.*

HELENA. I am absolutely exhausted by him, and can hardly stand.

VOITSKI. You are exhausted by him, and I am exhausted by my own self. I have not slept for three nights.

HELENA. Something is wrong in this house. Your mother hates everything but her pamphlets and the professor; the professor is vexed, he won't trust me, and fears you; Sonia is angry with her father, and with me, and hasn't spoken to me for two weeks; I am at the end of my strength, and have come near bursting into tears at least twenty times to-day. Something is wrong in this house.

VOITSKI. Leave speculating alone.

HELENA. You are cultured and intelligent, Ivan, and you surely understand that the world is not destroyed by villains and conflagrations, but by hate and malice and all this spiteful tattling. It is your duty to make peace, and not to growl at everything.

VOITSKI. Help me first to make peace with myself. My darling! [*Seizes her hand.*

HELENA. Let go! [*She drags her hand away*] Go away!

VOITSKI. Soon the rain will be over, and all nature will sigh and awake refreshed. Only I am not refreshed by the storm. Day and night the thought haunts me like a fiend, that my life is lost for ever. My past does not count, because I frittered it away on trifles, and the present has so terribly miscarried! What shall I do with my life and my love? What is to become of them? This wonderful feeling of mine will be wasted and lost as a ray of sunlight is lost that falls into a dark chasm, and my life will go with it.

HELENA. I am as it were benumbed when you speak to me of your love, and I don't know how to answer you. Forgive me, I have nothing to say to you. [*She tries to go out*] Good-night!

VOITSKI. [*Barring the way*] If you only knew how I am tortured by the thought that beside me in this house is another life that is being lost forever—it is yours! What are you waiting for? What accursed philosophy stands in your way? Oh, understand, understand——

HELENA. [*Looking at him intently*] Ivan, you are drunk!

VOITSKI. Perhaps. Perhaps.

HELENA. Where is the doctor?

VOITSKI. In there, spending the night with me. Perhaps I am drunk, perhaps I am; nothing is impossible.

HELENA. Have you just been drinking together? Why do you do that?

VOITSKI. Because in that way I get a taste of life. Let me do it, Helena!

HELENA. You never used to drink, and you never used to talk so much. Go to bed, I am tired of you.

VOITSKI. [*Falling on his knees before her*] My sweetheart, my beautiful one——

HELENA. [*Angrily*] Leave me alone! Really, this has become too disagreeable.

HELENA *goes out. A pause.*

VOITSKI. [*Alone*] She is gone! I met her first ten years ago, at her sister's house, when she was seventeen and I was thirty-seven. Why did I not fall in love with her then and propose to her? It would have been so easy! And now she would have been my wife. Yes, we would both have been waked to-night by the thunderstorm, and she would have been frightened, but I would have held her in my arms and whispered: "Don't be afraid! I am here." Oh, enchanting dream, so sweet that I laugh to think of it. [*He laughs*] But my God! My head reels! Why am I so old? Why won't she understand me? I hate all that rhetoric of hers, that morality of indolence, that absurd talk about the destruction of the world— [*A pause*] Oh, how I have been deceived! For years I have worshipped that miserable gout-ridden professor. Sonia and I have squeezed this estate dry for his sake. We have bartered our butter and curds and peas like misers, and have never kept a morsel for ourselves, so that we could scrape enough pennies together to send to him. I was proud of him and of his learning; I received all his words and writings as inspired, and now? Now he has retired, and what is the total of his life? A blank! He is absolutely unknown, and his fame has burst like a soap-bubble. I have been deceived; I see that now, basely deceived.

ASTROFF *comes in. He has his coat on, but is without his waistcoat or collar, and is slightly drunk.* TELEGIN *follows him, carrying a guitar.*

ASTROFF. Play!

TELEGIN. But every one is asleep.

ASTROFF. Play!

TELEGIN *begins to play softly.*

ASTROFF. Are you alone here? No women about?

[*Sings with his arms akimbo.*

"The hut is cold, the fire is dead;
Where shall the master lay his head?"

The thunderstorm woke me. It was a heavy shower. What time is it?

VOITSKI. The devil only knows.

ASTROFF. I thought I heard Helena's voice.

VOITSKI. She was here a moment ago.

ASTROFF. What a beautiful woman! [*Looking at the medicine bottles on the table*] Medicine, is it? What a variety we have; prescriptions from Moscow, from Kharkoff, from Tula! Why, he has been pestering all the towns of Russia with his gout! Is he ill, or simply shamming?

VOITSKI. He is really ill.

ASTROFF. What is the matter with you to-night? You seem sad. Is it because you are sorry for the professor?

VOITSKI. Leave me alone.

ASTROFF. Or in love with the professor's wife?

VOITSKI. She is my friend.

ASTROFF. Already?

VOITSKI. What do you mean by "already"?

ASTROFF. A woman can only become a man's friend after having first been his acquaintance and then his beloved—then she becomes his friend.

VOITSKI. What vulgar philosophy!

ASTROFF. What do you mean? Yes, I must confess I am getting vulgar, but then, you see, I am drunk. I usually only drink like this once a month. At such times my audacity and temerity know no bounds. I feel capable of anything. I attempt the most difficult operations and do them magnificently. The most brilliant plans for the future take

shape in my head. I am no longer a poor fool of a doctor, but mankind's greatest benefactor. I evolve my own system of philosophy and all of you seem to crawl at my feet like so many insects or microbes. [*To* TELEGIN] Play, Waffles!

TELEGIN. My dear boy, I would with all my heart, but do listen to reason; everybody in the house is asleep.

ASTROFF. Play!

TELEGIN *plays softly.*

ASTROFF. I want a drink. Come, we still have some brandy left. And then, as soon as it is day, you will come home with me. [*He sees* SONIA, *who comes in at that moment.*

ASTROFF. I beg your pardon, I have no collar on.

[*He goes out quickly, followed by* TELEGIN.

SONIA. Uncle Vanya, you and the doctor have been drinking! The good fellows have been getting together! It is all very well for him, he has always done it, but why do you follow his example? It looks dreadfully at your age.

VOITSKI. Age has nothing to do with it. When real life is wanting one must create an illusion. It is better than nothing.

SONIA. Our hay is all cut and rotting in these daily rains, and here you are busy creating illusions! You have given up the farm altogether. I have done all the work alone until I am at the end of my strength— [*Frightened*] Uncle! Your eyes are full of tears!

VOITSKI. Tears? Nonsense, there are no tears in my eyes. You looked at me then just as your dead mother used to, my darling— [*He eagerly kisses her face and hands*] My sister, my dearest sister, where are you now? Ah, if you only knew, if you only knew!

SONIA. If she only knew what, Uncle?

VOITSKI. My heart is bursting. It is awful. No matter, though. I must go. [*He goes out.*

SONIA. [*Knocks at the door*] Dr. Astroff! Are you awake? Please come here for a minute.

ASTROFF. [*Behind the door*] In a moment.

He appears in a few seconds. He has put on his collar and waistcoat.

ASTROFF. What do you want?

SONIA. Drink as much as you please yourself, if you don't find it revolting, but I implore you not to let my uncle do it. It is bad for him.

ASTROFF. Very well; we won't drink any more. I am going home at once. That is settled. It will be dawn by the time the horses are harnessed.

SONIA. It is still raining; wait till morning.

ASTROFF. The storm is blowing over. This is only the edge of it. I must go. And please don't ask me to come and see your father any more. I tell him he has gout, and he says it is rheumatism. I tell him to lie down, and he sits up. To-day he refused to see me at all.

SONIA. He has been spoilt. [*She looks in the sideboard*] Won't you have a bite to eat?

ASTROFF. Yes, please. I believe I will.

SONIA. I love to eat at night. I am sure we shall find something in here. They say that he has made a great many conquests in his life, and that the women have spoiled him. Here is some cheese for you.

[*They stand eating by the sideboard.*

ASTROFF. I haven't eaten anything to-day. Your father has a very difficult nature. [*He takes a bottle out of the sideboard*] May I? [*He pours himself a glass of vodka*] We are alone here, and I can speak frankly. Do you know, I could not stand living in this house for even a month? This atmos-

phere would stifle me. There is your father, entirely absorbed in his books, and his gout; there is your Uncle Vanya with his hypochondria, your grandmother, and finally, your step-mother——

SONIA. What about her?

ASTROFF. A human being should be entirely beautiful: the face, the clothes, the mind, the thoughts. Your step-mother is, of course, beautiful to look at, but don't you see? She does nothing but sleep and eat and walk and bewitch us, and that is all. She has no responsibilities, everything is done for her—am I not right? And an idle life can never be a pure one. [*A pause*] However, I may be judging her too severely. Like your Uncle Vanya, I am discontented, and so we are both grumblers.

SONIA. Aren't you satisfied with life?

ASTROFF. I like life as life, but I hate and despise it in a little Russian country village, and as far as my own personal life goes, by heaven! there is absolutely no redeeming feature about it. Haven't you noticed if you are riding through a dark wood at night and see a little light shining ahead, how you forget your fatigue and the darkness and the sharp twigs that whip your face? I work, that you know—as no one else in the country works. Fate beats me on without rest; at times I suffer unendurably and I see no light ahead. I have no hope; I do not like people. It is long since I have loved any one.

SONIA. You love no one?

ASTROFF. Not a soul. I only feel a sort of tenderness for your old nurse for old-times' sake. The peasants are all alike; they are stupid and live in dirt, and the educated people are hard to get along with. One gets tired of them. All our good friends are petty and shallow and see no farther than their own noses; in one word, they are dull. Those that have

brains are hysterical, devoured with a mania for self-analysis. They whine, they hate, they pick faults everywhere with unhealthy sharpness. They sneak up to me sideways, look at me out of a corner of the eye, and say: "That man is a lunatic," "That man is a wind-bag." Or, if they don't know what else to label me with, they say I am strange. I like the woods; that is strange. I don't eat meat; that is strange, too. Simple, natural relations between man and man or man and nature do not exist. [*He tries to go out;* SONIA *prevents him.*

SONIA. I beg you, I implore you, not to drink any more!

ASTROFF. Why not?

SONIA. It is so unworthy of you. You are well-bred, your voice is sweet, you are even—more than any one I know—handsome. Why do you want to resemble the common people that drink and play cards? Oh, don't, I beg you! You always say that people do not create anything, but only destroy what heaven has given them. Why, oh, why, do you destroy yourself? Oh, don't, I implore you not to! I entreat you!

ASTROFF. [*Gives her his hand*] I won't drink any more.

SONIA. Promise me.

ASTROFF. I give you my word of honour.

SONIA. [*Squeezing his hand*] Thank you.

ASTROFF. I have done with it. You see, I am perfectly sober again, and so I shall stay till the end of my life. [*He looks at his watch*] But, as I was saying, life holds nothing for me; my race is run. I am old, I am tired, I am trivial; my sensibilities are dead. I could never attach myself to any one again. I love no one, and—never shall! Beauty alone has the power to touch me still. I am deeply moved by it. Helena could turn my head in a day if she wanted to, but that is not love, that is not affection——

[*He shudders and covers his face with his hands.*

SONIA. What is it?

ASTROFF. Nothing. During Lent one of my patients died under chloroform.

SONIA. It is time to forget that. [*A pause*] Tell me, doctor, if I had a friend or a younger sister, and if you knew that she, well—loved you, what would you do?

ASTROFF. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] I don't know. I don't think I should do anything. I should make her understand that I could not return her love—however, my mind is not bothered about those things now. I must start at once if I am ever to get off. Good-bye, my dear girl. At this rate we shall stand here talking till morning. [*He shakes hands with her*] I shall go out through the sitting-room, because I am afraid your uncle might detain me. [*He goes out.*

SONIA. [*Alone*] Not a word! His heart and soul are still locked from me, and yet for some reason I am strangely happy. I wonder why? [*She laughs with pleasure*] I told him that he was well-bred and handsome and that his voice was sweet. Was that a mistake? I can still feel his voice vibrating in the air; it caresses me. [*Wringing her hands*] Oh! how terrible it is to be plain! I am plain, I know it. As I came out of church last Sunday I overheard a woman say, "She is a dear, noble girl, but what a pity she is so ugly!" So ugly!

HELENA *comes in and throws open the window.*

HELENA. The storm is over. What delicious air! [*A pause*] Where is the doctor?

SONIA. He has gone. [*A pause.*

HELENA. Sonia!

SONIA. Yes?

HELENA. How much longer are you going to sulk at me? We have not hurt each other. Why not be friends? We have had enough of this.

SONIA. I myself— [*She embraces* HELENA] Let us make peace.

HELENA. With all my heart. [*They are both moved.*

SONIA. Has papa gone to bed?

HELENA. No, he is sitting up in the drawing-room. Heaven knows what reason you and I had for not speaking to each other for weeks. [*Sees the open sideboard*] Who left the sideboard open?

SONIA. Dr. Astroff has just had supper.

HELENA. There is some wine. Let us seal our friendship.

SONIA. Yes, let us.

HELENA. Out of one glass. [*She fills a wine-glass*] So, we are friends, are we?

SONIA. Yes. [*They drink and kiss each other*] I have long wanted to make friends, but somehow, I was ashamed to.

[*She weeps.*

HELENA. Why are you crying?

SONIA. I don't know. It is nothing.

HELENA. There, there, don't cry. [*She weeps*] Silly! Now I am crying too. [*A pause*] You are angry with me because I seem to have married your father for his money, but don't believe the gossip you hear. I swear to you I married him for love. I was fascinated by his fame and learning. I know now that it was not real love, but it seemed real at the time. I am innocent, and yet your clever, suspicious eyes have been punishing me for an imaginary crime ever since my marriage.

SONIA. Peace, peace! Let us forget the past.

HELENA. You must not look so at people. It is not becoming to you. You must trust people, or life becomes impossible.

SONIA. Tell me truly, as a friend, are you happy?

HELENA. Truly, no.

SONIA. I knew it. One more question: do you wish your husband were young?

HELENA. What a child you are! Of course I do. Go on, ask something else.

SONIA. Do you like the doctor?

HELENA. Yes, very much indeed.

SONIA. [*Laughing*] I have a stupid face, haven't I? He has just gone out, and his voice is still in my ears; I hear his step; I see his face in the dark window. Let me say all I have in my heart! But no, I cannot speak of it so loudly. I am ashamed. Come to my room and let me tell you there. I seem foolish to you, don't I? Talk to me of him.

HELENA. What can I say?

SONIA. He is clever. He can do everything. He can cure the sick, and plant woods.

HELENA. It is not a question of medicine and woods, my dear, he is a man of genius. Do you know what that means? It means he is brave, profound, and of clear insight. He plants a tree and his mind travels a thousand years into the future, and he sees visions of the happiness of the human race. People like him are rare and should be loved. What if he does drink and act roughly at times? A man of genius cannot be a saint in Russia. There he lives, cut off from the world by cold and storm and endless roads of bottomless mud, surrounded by a rough people who are crushed by poverty and disease, his life one continuous struggle, with never a day's respite; how can a man live like that for forty years and keep himself sober and unspotted? [*Kissing* SONIA] I wish you happiness with all my heart; you deserve it. [*She gets up*] As for me, I am a worthless, futile woman. I have always been futile; in music, in love, in my husband's house—in a word, in everything. When you come to think of it, Sonia, I am really very, very unhappy. [*Walks ex-*

citedly up and down] Happiness can never exist for me in this world. Never. Why do you laugh?

SONIA. [*Laughing and covering her face with her hands*] I am so happy, so happy!

HELENA. I want to hear music. I might play a little.

SONIA. Oh, do, do! [*She embraces her*] I could not possibly go to sleep now. Do play!

HELENA. Yes, I will. Your father is still awake. Music irritates him when he is ill, but if he says I may, then I shall play a little. Go, Sonia, and ask him.

SONIA. Very well.

[*She goes out. The* WATCHMAN'S *rattle is heard in the garden.*

HELENA. It is long since I have heard music. And now, I shall sit and play, and weep like a fool. [*Speaking out of the window*] Is that you rattling out there, Ephim?

VOICE OF THE WATCHMAN. It is I.

HELENA. Don't make such a noise. Your master is ill.

VOICE OF THE WATCHMAN. I am going away this minute. [*Whistles a tune.*

SONIA. [*Comes back*] He says, no.

The curtain falls.

ACT III

The drawing-room of SEREBRAKOFF'S *house. There are three doors: one to the right, one to the left, and one in the centre of the room.* VOITSKI *and* SONIA *are sitting down.* HELENA *is walking up and down, absorbed in thought.*

VOITSKI. We were asked by the professor to be here at one o'clock. [*Looks at his watch*] It is now a quarter to one. It seems he has some communication to make to the world.

HELENA. Probably a matter of business.

VOITSKI. He never had any business. He writes twaddle, grumbles, and eats his heart out with jealousy; that's all he does.

SONIA. [*Reproachfully*] Uncle!

VOITSKI. All right. I beg your pardon. [*He points to* HELENA] Look at her. Wandering up and down from sheer idleness. A sweet picture, really.

HELENA. I wonder you are not bored, droning on in the same key from morning till night. [*Despairingly*] I am dying of this tedium. What shall I do?

SONIA. [*Shrugging her shoulders*] There is plenty to do if you would.

HELENA. For instance?

SONIA. You could help run this place, teach the children, care for the sick—isn't that enough? Before you and papa came, Uncle Vanya and I used to go to market ourselves to deal in flour.

HELENA. I don't know anything about such things, and besides, they don't interest me. It is only in novels that

women go out and teach and heal the peasants; how can I suddenly begin to do it?

SONIA. How can you live here and not do it? Wait awhile, you will get used to it all. [*Embraces her*] Don't be sad, dearest. [*Laughing*] You feel miserable and restless, and can't seem to fit into this life, and your restlessness is catching. Look at Uncle Vanya, he does nothing now but haunt you like a shadow, and I have left my work to-day to come here and talk with you. I am getting lazy, and don't want to go on with it. Dr. Astroff hardly ever used to come here; it was all we could do to persuade him to visit us once a month, and now he has abandoned his forestry and his practice, and comes every day. You must be a witch.

VOITSKI. Why should you languish here? Come, my dearest, my beauty, be sensible! The blood of a Nixey runs in your veins. Oh, won't you let yourself be one? Give your nature the reins for once in your life; fall head over ears in love with some other water sprite and plunge down head first into a deep pool, so that the Herr Professor and all of us may have our hands free again.

HELENA. [*Angrily*] Leave me alone! How cruel you are! [*She tries to go out.*

VOITSKI. [*Preventing her*] There, there, my beauty, I apologise. [*He kisses her hand*] Forgive me.

HELENA. Confess that you would try the patience of an angel.

VOITSKI. As a peace offering I am going to fetch some flowers which I picked for you this morning: some autumn roses, beautiful, sorrowful roses. [*He goes out.*

SONIA. Autumn roses, beautiful, sorrowful roses!

[*She and* HELENA *stand looking out of the window.*

HELENA. September already! How shall we live through the long winter here? [*A pause*] Where is the doctor?

SONIA. He is writing in Uncle Vanya's room. I am glad Uncle Vanya has gone out, I want to talk to you about something.

HELENA. About what?

SONIA. About what?

[*She lays her head on* HELENA'S *breast.*

HELENA. [*Stroking her hair*] There, there, that will do. Don't, Sonia.

SONIA. I am ugly!

HELENA. You have lovely hair.

SONIA. Don't say that! [*She turns to look at herself in the glass*] No, when a woman is ugly they always say she has beautiful hair or eyes. I have loved him now for six years; I have loved him more than one loves one's mother. I seem to hear him beside me every moment of the day. I feel the pressure of his hand on mine. If I look up, I seem to see him coming, and as you see, I run to you to talk of him. He is here every day now, but he never looks at me, he does not notice my presence. It is agony. I have absolutely no hope, no, no hope. Oh, my God! Give me strength to endure. I prayed all last night. I often go up to him and speak to him and look into his eyes. My pride is gone. I am not mistress of myself. Yesterday I told Uncle Vanya. I couldn't control myself, and all the servants know it. Every one knows that I love him.

HELENA. Does he?

SONIA. No, he never notices me.

HELENA. [*Thoughtfully*] He is a strange man. Listen, Sonia, will you allow me to speak to him? I shall be careful, only hint. [*A pause*] Really, to be in uncertainty all these years! Let me do it!

SONIA *nods an affirmative.*

HELENA. Splendid! It will be easy to find out whether

he loves you or not. Don't be ashamed, sweetheart, don't worry. I shall be careful; he will not notice a thing. We only want to find out whether it is yes or no, don't we? [*A pause*] And if it is no, then he must keep away from here, is that so?

SONIA *nods.*

HELENA. It will be easier not to see him any more. We won't put off the examination an instant. He said he had a sketch to show me. Go and tell him at once that I want to see him.

SONIA. [*In great excitement*] Will you tell me the whole truth?

HELENA. Of course I will. I am sure that no matter what it is, it will be easier for you to bear than this uncertainty. Trust to me, dearest.

SONIA. Yes, yes. I shall say that you want to see his sketch. [*She starts out, but stops near the door and looks back*] No, it is better not to know—and yet—there may be hope.

HELENA. What do you say?

SONIA. Nothing. [*She goes out.*

HELENA. [*Alone*] There is no greater sorrow than to know another's secret when you cannot help them. [*In deep thought*] He is obviously not in love with her, but why shouldn't he marry her? She is not pretty, but she is so clever and pure and good, she would make a splendid wife for a country doctor of his years. [*A pause*] I can understand how the poor child feels. She lives here in this desperate loneliness with no one around her except these colourless shadows that go mooning about talking nonsense and knowing nothing except that they eat, drink, and sleep. Among them appears from time to time this Dr. Astroff, so different, so handsome, so interesting, so charming. It is like seeing the moon rise on a dark night. Oh, to surrender

oneself to his embrace! To lose oneself in his arms! I am a little in love with him myself! Yes, I am lonely without him, and when I think of him I smile. That Uncle Vanya says I have the blood of a Nixey in my veins: "Give rein to your nature for once in your life!" Perhaps it is right that I should. Oh, to be free as a bird, to fly away from all your sleepy faces and your talk and forget that you have existed at all! But I am a coward, I am afraid; my conscience torments me. He comes here every day now. I can guess why, and feel guilty already; I should like to fall on my knees at Sonia's feet and beg her forgiveness, and weep.

ASTROFF *comes in carrying a portfolio.*

ASTROFF. How do you do? [*Shakes hands with her*] Do you want to see my sketch?

HELENA. Yes, you promised to show me what you had been doing. Have you time now?

ASTROFF. Of course I have!

He lays the portfolio on the table, takes out the sketch and fastens it to the table with thumb-tacks.

ASTROFF. Where were you born?

HELENA. [*Helping him*] In St. Petersburg.

ASTROFF. And educated?

HELENA. At the Conservatory there

ASTROFF. You don't find this life very interesting, I dare say?

HELENA. Oh, why not? It is true I don't know the country very well, but I have read a great deal about it.

ASTROFF. I have my own desk there in Ivan's room. When I am absolutely too exhausted to go on I drop everything and rush over here to forget myself in this work for an hour or two. Ivan and Miss Sonia sit rattling at their counting-boards, the cricket chirps, and I sit beside them and paint, feeling warm and peaceful. But I don't permit

myself this luxury very often, only once a month. [*Pointing to the picture*] Look there! That is a map of our country as it was fifty years ago. The green tints, both dark and light, represent forests. Half the map, as you see, is covered with it. Where the green is striped with red the forests were inhabited by elk and wild goats. Here on this lake, lived great flocks of swans and geese and ducks; as the old men say, there was a power of birds of every kind. Now they have vanished like a cloud. Beside the hamlets and villages, you see, I have dotted down here and there the various settlements, farms, hermit's caves, and water-mills. This country carried a great many cattle and horses, as you can see by the quantity of blue paint. For instance, see how thickly it lies in this part; there were great herds of them here, an average of three horses to every house. [*A pause*] Now, look lower down. This is the country as it was twenty-five years ago. Only a third of the map is green now with forests. There are no goats left and no elk. The blue paint is lighter, and so on, and so on. Now we come to the third part; our country as it appears to-day. We still see spots of green, but not much. The elk, the swans, the black-cock have disappeared. It is, on the whole, the picture of a regular and slow decline which it will evidently only take about ten or fifteen more years to complete. You may perhaps object that it is the march of progress, that the old order must give place to the new, and you might be right if roads had been run through these ruined woods, or if factories and schools had taken their place. The people then would have become better educated and healthier and richer, but as it is, we have nothing of the sort. We have the same swamps and mosquitoes; the same disease and want; the typhoid, the diphtheria, the burning villages. We are confronted by the degradation of our country, brought on by

the fierce struggle for existence of the human race. It is the consequence of the ignorance and unconsciousness of starving, shivering, sick humanity that, to save its children, instinctively snatches at everything that can warm it and still its hunger. So it destroys everything it can lay its hands on, without a thought for the morrow. And almost everything has gone, and nothing has been created to take its place. [*Coldly*] But I see by your face that I am not interesting you.

HELENA. I know so little about such things!

ASTROFF. There is nothing to know. It simply isn't interesting, that's all.

HELENA. Frankly, my thoughts were elsewhere. Forgive me! I want to submit you to a little examination, but I am embarrassed and don't know how to begin.

ASTROFF. An examination?

HELENA. Yes, but quite an innocent one. Sit down. [*They sit down*] It is about a certain young girl I know. Let us discuss it like honest people, like friends, and then forget what has passed between us, shall we?

ASTROFF. Very well.

HELENA. It is about my step-daughter, Sonia. Do you like her?

ASTROFF. Yes, I respect her.

HELENA. Do you like her—as a woman?

ASTROFF. [*Slowly*] No.

HELENA. One more word, and that will be the last. You have not noticed anything?

ASTROFF. No, nothing.

HELENA. [*Taking his hand*] You do not love her. I see that in your eyes. She is suffering. You must realise that, and not come here any more.

ASTROFF. My sun has set, yes, and then I haven't the

time. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] Where shall I find time for such things? [*He is embarrassed.*

HELENA. Bah! What an unpleasant conversation! I am as out of breath as if I had been running three miles uphill. Thank heaven, that is over! Now let us forget everything as if nothing had been said. You are sensible. You understand. [*A pause*] I am actually blushing.

ASTROFF. If you had spoken a month ago I might perhaps have considered it, but now— [*He shrugs his shoulders*] Of course, if she is suffering—but I cannot understand why you had to put me through this examination. [*He searches her face with his eyes, and shakes his finger at her*] Oho, you are wily!

HELENA. What does this mean?

ASTROFF. [*Laughing*] You are a wily one! I admit that Sonia is suffering, but what does this examination of yours mean? [*He prevents her from retorting, and goes on quickly*] Please don't put on such a look of surprise; you know perfectly well why I come here every day. Yes, you know perfectly why and for whose sake I come! Oh, my sweet tigress! don't look at me in that way; I am an old bird!

HELENA. [*Perplexed*] A tigress? I don't understand you.

ASTROFF. Beautiful, sleek tigress, you must have your victims! For a whole month I have done nothing but seek you eagerly. I have thrown over everything for you, and you love to see it. Now then, I am sure you knew all this without putting me through your examination. [*Crossing his arms and bowing his head*] I surrender. Here you have me—now, eat me.

HELENA. You have gone mad!

ASTROFF. You are afraid!

HELENA. I am a better and stronger woman than you think me. Good-bye. [*She tries to leave the room.*

ASTROFF. Why good-bye? Don't say good-bye, don't waste words. Oh, how lovely you are—what hands!

[*He kisses her hands.*

HELENA. Enough of this! [*She frees her hands*] Leave the room! You have forgotten yourself.

ASTROFF. Tell me, tell me, where can we meet to-morrow? [*He puts his arm around her*] Don't you see that we must meet, that it is inevitable?

He kisses her. VOITSKI *comes in carrying a bunch of roses, and stops in the doorway.*

HELENA. [*Without seeing* VOITSKI] Have pity! Leave me, [*Lays her head on* ASTROFF'S *shoulder*] Don't!

[*She tries to break away from him.*

ASTROFF. [*Holding her by the waist*] Be in the forest to-morrow at two o'clock. Will you? Will you?

HELENA. [*Sees* VOITSKI] Let me go! [*Goes to the window deeply embarrassed*] This is appalling!

VOITSKI. [*Throws the flowers on a chair, and speaks in great excitement, wiping his face with his handkerchief*] Nothing—yes, yes, nothing.

ASTROFF. The weather is fine to-day, my dear Ivan; the morning was overcast and looked like rain, but now the sun is shining again. Honestly, we have had a very fine autumn, and the wheat is looking fairly well. [*Puts his map back into the portfolio*] But the days are growing short.

HELENA. [*Goes quickly up to* VOITSKI] You must do your best; you must use all your power to get my husband and myself away from here to-day! Do you hear? I say, this very day!

VOITSKI. [*Wiping his face*] Oh! Ah! Oh! All right! I—Helena, I saw everything!

HELENA. [*In great agitation*] Do you hear me? I must leave here this very day!

SEREBRAKOFF, SONIA, MARINA, *and* TELEGIN *come in.*

TELEGIN. I am not very well myself, your Excellency. I have been limping for two days, and my head——

SEREBRAKOFF. Where are the others? I hate this house. It is a regular labyrinth. Every one is always scattered through the twenty-six enormous rooms; one never can find a soul. [*Rings*] Ask my wife and Madame Voitskaya to come here!

HELENA. I am here already.

SEREBRAKOFF. Please, all of you, sit down.

SONIA. [*Goes up to* HELENA *and asks anxiously*] What did he say?

HELENA. I'll tell you later.

SONIA. You are moved. [*Looking quickly and inquiringly into her face*] I understand; he said he would not come here any more. [*A pause*] Tell me, did he?

HELENA *nods.*

SEREBRAKOFF. [*To* TELEGIN] One can, after all, become reconciled to being an invalid, but not to this country life. The ways of it stick in my throat and I feel exactly as if I had been whirled off the earth and landed on a strange planet. Please be seated, ladies and gentlemen. Sonia! [SONIA *does not hear. She is standing with her head bowed sadly forward on her breast*] Sonia! [*A pause*] She does not hear me. [*To* MARINA] Sit down too, nurse. [MARINA *sits down and begins to knit her stocking*] I crave your indulgence, ladies and gentlemen; hang your ears, if I may say so, on the peg of attention. [*He laughs.*

VOITSKI. [*Agitated*] Perhaps you do not need me—may I be excused?

SEREBRAKOFF. No, you are needed now more than any one.

VOITSKI. What is it you want of me?

SEREBRAKOFF. You—but what are you angry about? If it is anything I have done, I ask you to forgive me.

VOITSKI. Oh, drop that and come to business; what do you want?

MME. VOITSKAYA *comes in.*

SEREBRAKOFF. Here is mother. Ladies and gentlemen, I shall begin. I have asked you to assemble here, my friends, in order to discuss a very important matter. I want to ask you for your assistance and advice, and knowing your unfailing amiability I think I can count on both. I am a book-worm and a scholar, and am unfamiliar with practical affairs. I cannot, I find, dispense with the help of well-informed people such as you, Ivan, and you, Telegin, and you, mother. The truth is, *manet omnes una nox*, that is to say, our lives are in the hands of God, and as I am old and ill, I realise that the time has come for me to dispose of my property in regard to the interests of my family. My life is nearly over, and I am not thinking of myself, but I have a young wife and daughter. [*A pause*] I cannot continue to live in the country; we were not made for country life, and yet we cannot afford to live in town on the income derived from this estate. We might sell the woods, but that would be an expedient we could not resort to every year. We must find some means of guaranteeing to ourselves a certain more or less fixed yearly income. With this object in view, a plan has occurred to me which I now have the honour of presenting to you for your consideration. I shall only give you a rough outline, avoiding all details. Our estate does not pay on an average more than two per cent on the money invested in it. I propose to sell it. If we then invest our capital in bonds, it will earn us four to five per cent, and we should probably have a surplus over of several

thousand roubles, with which we could buy a summer cottage in Finland——

VOITSKI. Hold on! Repeat what you just said; I don't think I heard you quite right.

SEREBRAKOFF. I said we would invest the money in bonds and buy a cottage in Finland with the surplus.

VOITSKI. No, not Finland—you said something else.

SEREBRAKOFF. I propose to sell this place.

VOITSKI. Aha! That was it! So you are going to sell the place? Splendid. The idea is a rich one. And what do you propose to do with my old mother and me and with Sonia here?

SEREBRAKOFF. That will be decided in due time. We can't do everything at once.

VOITSKI. Wait! It is clear that until this moment I have never had a grain of sense in my head. I have always been stupid enough to think that the estate belonged to Sonia. My father bought it as a wedding present for my sister, and I foolishly imagined that as our laws were made for Russians and not Turks, my sister's estate would come down to her child.

SEREBRAKOFF. Of course it is Sonia's. Has any one denied it? I don't want to sell it without Sonia's consent; on the contrary, what I am doing is for Sonia's good.

VOITSKI. This is absolutely incomprehensible. Either I have gone mad or—or——

MME. VOITSKAYA. Jean, don't contradict Alexander. Trust to him; he knows better than we do what is right and what is wrong.

VOITSKI. I shan't. Give me some water. [*He drinks*] Go ahead! Say anything you please—anything!

SEREBRAKOFF. I can't imagine why you are so upset. I don't pretend that my scheme is an ideal one, and if you all object to it I shall not insist. [*A pause.*

TELEGIN. [*With embarrassment*] I not only nourish feelings of respect toward learning, your Excellency, but I am also drawn to it by family ties. My brother Gregory's wife's brother, whom you may know; his name is Constantine Lakedemonoff, and he used to be a magistrate—

VOITSKI. Stop, Waffles. This is business; wait a bit, we will talk of that later. [*To* SEREBRAKOFF] There now, ask him what he thinks; this estate was bought from his uncle.

SEREBRAKOFF. Ah! Why should I ask questions? What good would it do?

VOITSKI. The price was ninety-five thousand roubles. My father paid seventy and left a debt of twenty-five. Now listen! This place could never have been bought had I not renounced my inheritance in favour of my sister, whom I deeply loved—and what is more, I worked for ten years like an ox, and paid off the debt.

SEREBRAKOFF. I regret ever having started this conversation.

VOITSKI. Thanks entirely to my own personal efforts, the place is entirely clear of debts, and now, when I have grown old, you want to throw me out, neck and crop!

SEREBRAKOFF. I can't imagine what you are driving at.

VOITSKI. For twenty-five years I have managed this place, and have sent you the returns from it like the most honest of servants, and you have never given me one single word of thanks for my work, not one—neither in my youth nor now. You allowed me a meagre salary of five hundred roubles a year, a beggar's pittance, and have never even thought of adding a rouble to it.

SEREBRAKOFF. What did I know about such things, Ivan? I am not a practical man and don't understand them. You might have helped yourself to all you wanted.

VOITSKI. Yes, why did I not steal? Don't you all despise

me for not stealing, when it would have been only justice? And I should not now have been a beggar!

MME. VOITSKAYA. [*Sternly*] Jean!

TELEGIN. [*Agitated*] Vanya, old man, don't talk in that way. Why spoil such pleasant relations? [*He embraces him*] Do stop!

VOITSKI. For twenty-five years I have been sitting here with my mother like a mole in a burrow. Our every thought and hope was yours and yours only. By day we talked with pride of you and your work, and spoke your name with veneration; our nights we wasted reading the books and papers which my soul now loathes.

TELEGIN. Don't, Vanya, don't. I can't stand it.

SEREBRAKOFF. [*Wrathfully*] What under heaven do you want, anyway?

VOITSKI. We used to think of you as almost superhuman, but now the scales have fallen from my eyes and I see you as you are! You write on art without knowing anything about it. Those books of yours which I used to admire are not worth one copper kopeck. You are a hoax!

SEREBRAKOFF. Can't any one make him stop? I am going!

HELENA. Ivan, I command you to stop this instant! Do you hear me?

VOITSKI. I refuse! [SEREBRAKOFF *tries to get out of the room, but* VOITSKI *bars the door*] Wait! I have not done yet! You have wrecked my life. I have never lived. My best years have gone for nothing, have been ruined, thanks to you. You are my most bitter enemy!

TELEGIN. I can't stand it; I can't stand it. I am going.

[*He goes out in great excitement.*

SEREBRAKOFF. But what do you want? What earthly right have you to use such language to me? Ruination! If this estate is yours, then take it, and let me be ruined!

HELENA. I am going away out of this hell this minute. [*Shrieks*] This is too much!

VOITSKI. My life has been a failure. I am clever and brave and strong. If I had lived a normal life I might have become another Schopenhauer or Dostoieffski. I am losing my head! I am going crazy! Mother, I am in despair! Oh, mother!

MME. VOITSKAYA. [*Sternly*] Listen, Alexander!

SONIA *falls on her knees beside the nurse and nestles against her.*

SONIA. Oh, nurse, nurse!

VOITSKI. Mother! What shall I do? But no, don't speak! I know what to do. [*To* SEREBRAKOFF] And you will understand me!

He goes out through the door in the centre of the room and MME. VOITSKAYA *follows him.*

SEREBRAKOFF. Tell me, what on earth is the matter? Take this lunatic out of my sight! I cannot possibly live under the same roof with him. His room [*He points to the centre door*] is almost next door to mine. Let him take himself off into the village or into the wing of the house, or I shall leave here at once. I cannot stay in the same house with him.

HELENA. [*To her husband*] We are leaving to-day; we must get ready at once for our departure.

SEREBRAKOFF. What a perfectly dreadful man!

SONIA. [*On her knees beside the nurse and turning to her father. She speaks with emotion*] You must be kind to us, papa. Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy! [*Controlling her despair*] Have pity on us. Remember how Uncle Vanya and Granny used to copy and translate your books for you every night—every, every night. Uncle Vanya has toiled without rest; he would never spend a penny on us, we sent

it all to you. We have not eaten the bread of idleness. I am not saying this as I should like to, but you must understand us, papa, you must be merciful to us.

HELENA. [*Very excited, to her husband*] For heaven's sake, Alexander, go and have a talk with him—explain!

SEREBRAKOFF. Very well, I shall have a talk with him, but I won't apologise for a thing. I am not angry with him, but you must confess that his behaviour has been strange, to say the least. Excuse me, I shall go to him.

[*He goes out through the centre door.*

HELENA. Be gentle with him; try to quiet him.

[*She follows him out.*

SONIA. [*Nestling nearer to* MARINA] Nurse, oh, nurse!

MARINA. It's all right, my baby. When the geese have cackled they will be still again. First they cackle and then they stop.

SONIA. Nurse!

MARINA. You are trembling all over, as if you were freezing. There, there, little orphan baby, God is merciful. A little linden-tea, and it will all pass away. Don't cry, my sweetest. [*Looking angrily at the door in the centre of the room*] See, the geese have all gone now. The devil take them!

A shot is heard. HELENA *screams behind the scenes.* SONIA *shuddders.*

MARINA. Bang! What's that?

SEREBRAKOFF. [*Comes in reeling with terror*] Hold him! hold him! He has gone mad!

HELENA *and* VOITSKI *are seen struggling in the doorway.*

HELENA. [*Trying to wrest the revolver from him*] Give it to me; give it to me, I tell you!

VOITSKI. Let me go, Helena, let me go! [*He frees himself and rushes in, looking everywhere for* SEREBRAKOFF] Where is he? Ah, there he is! [*He shoots at him. A pause*] I didn't

get him? I missed again? [*Furiously*] Damnation! Damnation! To hell with him!

He flings the revolver on the floor, and drops helpless into a chair. SEREBRAKOFF *stands as if stupefied.* HELENA *leans against the wall, almost fainting.*

HELENA. Take me away! Take me away! I can't stay here—I can't!

VOITSKI. [*In despair*] Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?

SONIA. [*Softly*] Oh, nurse, nurse!

The curtain falls.

ACT IV

VOITSKI'S *bedroom, which is also his office. A table stands near the window; on it are ledgers, letter scales, and papers of every description. Near by stands a smaller table belonging to* ASTROFF, *with his paints and drawing materials. On the wall hangs a cage containing a starling. There is also a map of Africa on the wall, obviously of no use to anybody. There is a large sofa covered with buckram. A door to the left leads into an inner room; one to the right leads into the front hall, and before this door lies a mat for the peasants with their muddy boots to stand on. It is an autumn evening. The silence is profound.* TELEGIN *and* MARINA *are sitting facing one another, winding wool.*

TELEGIN. Be quick, Marina, or we shall be called away to say good-bye before you have finished. The carriage has already been ordered.

MARINA. [*Trying to wind more quickly*] I am a little tired.

TELEGIN. They are going to Kharkoff to live.

MARINA. They do well to go.

TELEGIN. They have been frightened. The professor's wife won't stay here an hour longer. "If we are going at all, let's be off," says she, "we shall go to Kharkoff and look about us, and then we can send for our things." They are travelling light. It seems, Marina, that fate has decreed for them not to live here.

MARINA. And quite rightly. What a storm they have just raised! It was shameful!

TELEGIN. It was indeed. The scene was worthy of the brush of Aibazofski.

MARINA. I wish I'd never laid eyes on them. [*A pause*] Now we shall have things as they were again: tea at eight, dinner at one, and supper in the evening; everything in order as decent folks, as Christians like to have it. [*Sighs*] It is a long time since I have eaten noodles.

TELEGIN. Yes, we haven't had noodles for ages. [*A pause*] Not for ages. As I was going through the village this morning, Marina, one of the shop-keepers called after me, "Hi! you hanger-on!" I felt it bitterly.

MARINA. Don't pay the least attention to them, master; we are all dependents on God. You and Sonia and all of us. Every one must work, no one can sit idle. Where is Sonia?

TELEGIN. In the garden with the doctor, looking for Ivan. They fear he may lay violent hands on himself.

MARINA. Where is his pistol?

TELEGIN. [*Whispers*] I hid it in the cellar.

VOITSKI *and* ASTROFF *come in.*

VOITSKI. Leave me alone! [*To* MARINA *and* TELEGIN] Go away! Go away and leave me to myself, if but for an hour. I won't have you watching me like this!

TELEGIN. Yes, yes, Vanya. [*He goes out on tiptoe.*

MARINA. The gander cackles; ho! ho! ho!

[*She gathers up her wool and goes out.*

VOITSKI. Leave me by myself!

ASTROFF. I would, with the greatest pleasure. I ought to have gone long ago, but I shan't leave you until you have returned what you took from me.

VOITSKI. I took nothing from you.

ASTROFF. I am not jesting, don't detain me, I really must go.

VOITSKI. I took nothing of yours.

ASTROFF. You didn't? Very well, I shall have to wait a little longer, and then you will have to forgive me if I resort to force. We shall have to bind you and search you. I mean what I say.

VOITSKI. Do as you please. [*A pause*] Oh, to make such a fool of myself! To shoot twice and miss him both times! I shall never forgive myself.

ASTROFF. When the impulse came to shoot, it would have been as well had you put a bullet through your own head.

VOITSKI. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] Strange! I attempted murder, and am not going to be arrested or brought to trial. That means they think me mad. [*With a bitter laugh*] Me! I am mad, and those who hide their worthlessness, their dulness, their crying heartlessness behind a professor's mask, are sane! Those who marry old men and then deceive them under the noses of all, are sane! I saw you kiss her; I saw you in each other's arms!

ASTROFF. Yes, sir, I did kiss her; so there.

[*He puts his thumb to his nose.*

VOITSKI. [*His eyes on the door*] No, it is the earth that is mad, because she still bears us on her breast.

ASTROFF. That is nonsense.

VOITSKI. Well? Am I not a madman, and therefore irresponsible? Haven't I the right to talk nonsense?

ASTROFF. This is a farce! You are not mad; you are simply a ridiculous fool. I used to think every fool was out of his senses, but now I see that lack of sense is a man's normal state, and you are perfectly normal.

VOITSKI. [*Covers his face with his hands*] Oh! If you knew how ashamed I am! These piercing pangs of shame are like nothing on earth. [*In an agonised voice*] I can't endure them! [*He leans against the table*] What can I do? What can I do?

ASTROFF. Nothing.

VOITSKI. You must tell me something! Oh, my God! I am forty-seven years old. I may live to sixty; I still have thirteen years before me; an enternity! How shall I be able to endure life for thirteen years? What shall I do? How can I fill them? Oh, don't you see? [*He presses* ASTROFF'S *hand convulsively*] Don't you see, if only I could live the rest of my life in some new way! If I could only wake some still, bright morning and feel that life had begun again; that the past was forgotten and had vanished like smoke. [*He weeps*] Oh, to begin life anew! Tell me, tell me how to begin.

ASTROFF. [*Crossly*] What nonsense! What sort of a new life can you and I look forward to? We can have no hope.

VOITSKI. None?

ASTROFF. None. Of that I am convinced.

VOITSKI. Tell me what to do. [*He puts his hand to his heart*] I feel such a burning pain here.

ASTROFF. [*Shouts angrily*] Stop! [*Then, more gently*] It may be that posterity, which will despise us for our blind and stupid lives, will find some road to happiness; but we—you and I—have but one hope, the hope that we may be visited by visions, perhaps by pleasant ones, as we lie resting in our graves. [*Sighing*] Yes, brother, there were only two respectable, intelligent men in this county, you and I. Ten years or so of this life of ours, this miserable life, have sucked us under, and we have become as contemptible and petty as the rest. But don't try to talk me out of my purpose! Give me what you took from me, will you?

VOITSKI. I took nothing from you.

ASTROFF. You took a little bottle of morphine out of my medicine-case. [*A pause*] Listen! If you are positively determined to make an end to yourself, go into the woods and shoot yourself there. Give up the morphine, or there will

be a lot of talk and guesswork; people will think I gave it to you. I don't fancy having to perform a post-mortem on you. Do you think I should find it interesting?

SONIA *comes in.*

VOITSKI. Leave me alone.

ASTROFF. [*To* SONIA] Sonia, your uncle has stolen a bottle of morphine out of my medicine-case and won't give it up. Tell him that his behaviour is—well, unwise. I haven't time, I must be going.

SONIA. Uncle Vanya, did you take the morphine?

ASTROFF. Yes, he took it. [*A pause*] I am absolutely sure.

SONIA. Give it up! Why do you want to frighten us? [*Tenderly*] Give it up, Uncle Vanya! My misfortune is perhaps even greater than yours, but I am not plunged in despair. I endure my sorrow, and shall endure it until my life comes to a natural end. You must endure yours, too. [*A pause*] Give it up! Dear, darling Uncle Vanya. Give it up! [*She weeps*] You are so good, I am sure you will have pity on us and give it up. You must endure your sorrow, Uncle Vanya; you must endure it.

VOITSKI *takes a bottle from the drawer of the table and hands it to* ASTROFF.

VOITSKI. There it is! [*To* SONIA] And now, we must get to work at once; we must do something, or else I shall not be able to endure it.

SONIA. Yes, yes, to work! As soon as we have seen them off we shall go to work. [*She nervously straightens out the papers on the table*] Everything is in a muddle!

ASTROFF. [*Putting the bottle in his case, which he straps together*] Now I can be off.

HELENA *comes in.*

HELENA. Are you here, Ivan? We are starting in a moment. Go to Alexander, he wants to speak to you.

SONIA. Go, Uncle Vanya. [*She takes* VOITSKI'S *arm*] Come, you and papa must make peace; that is absolutely necessary.

SONIA *and* VOITSKI *go out.*

HELENA. I am going away. [*She gives* ASTROFF *her hand*] Good-bye.

ASTROFF. So soon?

HELENA. The carriage is waiting.

ASTROFF. Good-bye.

HELENA. You promised me you would go away yourself to-day.

ASTROFF. I have not forgotten. I am going at once. [*A pause*] Were you frightened? Was it so terrible?

HELENA. Yes.

ASTROFF. Couldn't you stay? Couldn't you? To-morrow—in the forest——

HELENA. No. It is all settled, and that is why I can look you so bravely in the face. Our departure is fixed. One thing I must ask of you: don't think too badly of me; I should like you to respect me.

ASTROFF. Ah! [*With an impatient gesture*] Stay, I implore you! Confess that there is nothing for you to do in this world. You have no object in life; there is nothing to occupy your attention, and sooner or later your feelings must master you. It is inevitable. It would be better if it happened not in Kharkoff or in Kursk, but here, in nature's lap. It would then at least be poetical, even beautiful. Here you have the forests, the houses half in ruins that Turgenieff writes of.

HELENA. How comical you are! I am angry with you and yet I shall always remember you with pleasure. You are interesting and original. You and I will never meet again, and so I shall tell you—why should I conceal it?—that I am just a little in love with you. Come, one more

last pressure of our hands, and then let us part good friends. Let us not bear each other any ill will.

ASTROFF. [*Pressing her hand*] Yes, go. [*Thoughtfully*] You seem to be sincere and good, and yet there is something strangely disquieting about all your personality. No sooner did you arrive here with your husband than every one whom you found busy and actively creating something was forced to drop his work and give himself up for the whole summer to your husband's gout and yourself. You and he have infected us with your idleness. I have been swept off my feet; I have not put my hand to a thing for weeks, during which sickness has been running its course unchecked among the people, and the peasants have been pasturing their cattle in my woods and young plantations. Go where you will, you and your husband will always carry destruction in your train. I am joking of course, and yet I am strangely sure that had you stayed here we should have been overtaken by the most immense desolation. I would have gone to my ruin, and you—you would not have prospered. So go! E finita la comedia!

HELENA. [*Snatching a pencil off* ASTROFF'S *table, and hiding it with a quick movement*] I shall take this pencil for memory!

ASTROFF. How strange it is. We meet, and then suddenly it seems that we must part forever. That is the way in this world. As long as we are alone, before Uncle Vanya comes in with a bouquet—allow me—to kiss you good-bye —may I? [*He kisses her on the cheek*] So! Splendid!

HELENA. I wish you every happiness. [*She glances about her*] For once in my life, I shall! and scorn the consequences! [*She kisses him impetuously, and they quickly part*] I must go.

ASTROFF. Yes, go. If the carriage is there, then start at once. [*They stand listening.*

ASTROFF. E finita!

VOITSKI, SEREBRAKOFF, MME. VOITSKAYA *with her book*, TELEGIN, *and* SONIA *come in.*

SEREBRAKOFF. [*To* VOITSKI] Shame on him who bears malice for the past. I have gone through so much in the last few hours that I feel capable of writing a whole treatise on the conduct of life for the instruction of posterity. I gladly accept your apology, and myself ask your forgiveness.

[*He kisses* VOITSKI *three times.*

HELENA *embraces* SONIA.

SEREBRAKOFF. [*Kissing* MME. VOITSKAYA'S *hand*] Mother!

MME. VOITSKAYA. [*Kissing him*] Have your picture taken, Alexander, and send me one. You know how dear you are to me.

TELEGIN. Good-bye, your Excellency. Don't forget us.

SEREBRAKOFF. [*Kissing his daughter*] Good-bye, good-bye all. [*Shaking hands with* ASTROFF] Many thanks for your pleasant company. I have a deep regard for your opinions and your enthusiasm, but let me, as an old man, give one word of advice at parting: do something, my friend! Work! Do something! [*They all bow*] Good luck to you all.

[*He goes out followed by* MME. VOITSKAYA *and* SONIA.

VOITSKI. [*Kissing* HELENA'S *hand fervently*] Good-bye—forgive me. I shall never see you again!

HELENA. [*Touched*] Good-bye, dear boy.

She lightly kisses his head as he bends over her hand, and goes out.

ASTROFF. Tell them to bring my carriage around too, Waffles.

TELEGIN. All right, old man.

ASTROFF *and* VOITSKI *are left behind alone.* ASTROFF *collects his paints and drawing materials on the table and packs them away in a box.*

ASTROFF. Why don't you go to see them off?

VOITSKI. Let them go! I—I can't go out there. I feel too sad. I must go to work on something at once. To work! To work!

He rummages through his papers on the table. A pause. The tinkling of bells is heard as the horses trot away.

ASTROFF. They have gone! The professor, I suppose, is glad to go. He couldn't be tempted back now by a fortune.

MARINA *comes in.*

MARINA. They have gone.

[*She sits down in an arm-chair and knits her stocking.*

SONIA *comes in wiping her eyes.*

SONIA. They have gone. God be with them. [*To her uncle*] And now, Uncle Vanya, let us do something!

VOITSKI. To work! To work!

SONIA. It is long, long, since you and I have sat together at this table. [*She lights a lamp on the table*] No ink! [*She takes the inkstand to the cupboard and fills it from an ink-bottle*] How sad it is to see them go!

MME. VOITSKAYA *comes slowly in.*

MME. VOITSKAYA. They have gone.

She sits down and at once becomes absorbed in her book.

SONIA *sits down at the table and looks through an account book.*

SONIA. First, Uncle Vanya, let us write up the accounts. They are in a dreadful state. Come, begin. You take one and I will take the other.

VOITSKI. In account with —— [*They sit silently writing.*

MARINA. [*Yawning*] The sand-man has come.

ASTROFF. How still it is. Their pens scratch, the cricket sings; it is so warm and comfortable. I hate to go.

[*The tinkling of bells is heard.*

ASTROFF. My carriage has come. There now remains but

to say good-bye to you, my friends, and to my table here, and then—away! [*He puts the map into the portfolio.*

MARINA. Don't hurry away; sit a little longer with us.

ASTROFF. Impossible.

VOITSKI. [*Writing*] And carry forward from the old debt two seventy-five——

WORKMAN *comes in.*

WORKMAN. Your carriage is waiting, sir.

ASTROFF. All right. [*He hands the* WORKMAN *his medicine-case, portfolio, and box*] Look out, don't crush the portfolio!

WORKMAN. Very well, sir.

SONIA. When shall we see you again?

ASTROFF. Hardly before next summer. Probably not this winter, though, of course, if anything should happen you will let me know. [*He shakes hands with them*] Thank you for your kindness, for your hospitality, for everything! [*He goes up to* MARINA *and kisses her head*] Good-bye, old nurse!

MARINA. Are you going without your tea?

ASTROFF. I don't want any, nurse.

MARINA. Won't you have a drop of vodka?

ASTROFF. [*Hesitatingly*] Yes, I might.

MARINA *goes out.*

ASTROFF. [*After a pause*] My off-wheeler has gone lame for some reason. I noticed it yesterday when Peter was taking him to water.

VOITSKI. You should have him re-shod.

ASTROFF. I shall have to go around by the blacksmith's on my way home. It can't be avoided. [*He stands looking up at the map of Africa hanging on the wall*] I suppose it is roasting hot in Africa now.

VOITSKI. Yes, I suppose it is.

MARINA *comes back carrying a tray on which are a glass of vodka and a piece of bread.*

MARINA. Help yourself.

ASTROFF *drinks.*

MARINA. To your good health! [*She bows deeply*] Eat your bread with it.

ASTROFF. No, I like it so. And now, good-bye. [*To* MARINA] You needn't come out to see me off, nurse.

He goes out. SONIA *follows him with a candle to light him to the carriage.* MARINA *sits down in her arm-chair.*

VOITSKI. [*Writing*] On the 2d of February, twenty pounds of butter; on the 16th, twenty pounds of butter again. Buckwheat flour— [*A pause. Bells are heard tinkling.*

MARINA. He has gone. [*A pause.*

SONIA *comes in and sets the candle-stick on the table.*

SONIA. He has gone.

VOITSKI. [*Adding and writing*] Total, fifteen—twenty-five—

SONIA *sits down and begins to write.*

MARINA. [*Yawning*] Oh, ho! The Lord have mercy.

TELEGIN *comes in on tiptoe, sits down near the door, and begins to tune his guitar.*

VOITSKI. [*To* SONIA, *stroking her hair*] Oh, my child, I am so miserable; if you only knew how miserable I am!

SONIA. What can we do? We must live our lives. [*A pause*] Yes, we shall live, Uncle Vanya. We shall live through the long procession of days before us, and through the long evenings; we shall patiently bear the trials that fate imposes on us; we shall work for others without rest, both now and when we are old; and when our last hour comes we shall meet it humbly, and there, beyond the grave, we shall say that we have suffered and wept, that our life was bitter, and God will have pity on us. Ah, then dear, dear Uncle, we shall see that bright and beautiful life; we shall rejoice and look back upon our sorrow here; a tender smile

—and—we shall rest. I have faith, Uncle, fervent, passionate faith. [SONIA *kneels down before her uncle and lays her head on his hands. She speaks in a weary voice*] We shall rest. [TELEGIN *plays softly on the guitar*] We shall rest. We shall hear the angels. We shall see heaven shining like a jewel. We shall see all evil and all our pain sink away in the great compassion that shall enfold the world. Our life will be as peaceful and tender and sweet as a caress. I have faith; I have faith. [*She wipes away her tears*] My poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you are crying! [*Weeping*] You have never known what happiness was, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait! We shall rest. [*She embraces him*] We shall rest. [*The* WATCHMAN'S *rattle is heard in the garden;* TELEGIN *plays softly;* MME. VOITSKAYA *writes something on the margin of her pamphlet;* MARINA *knits her stocking*] We shall rest.

The curtain slowly falls.

IVANOFF

A PLAY

CHARACTERS

NICHOLAS IVANOFF, *perpetual member of the Council of Peasant Affairs*
ANNA, *his wife. Née Sarah Abramson*
MATTHEW SHABELSKI, *a count, uncle of Ivanoff*
PAUL LEBEDIEFF, *President of the Board of the Zemstvo*
ZINAIDA, *his wife*
SASHA, *their daughter, twenty years old*
LVOFF, *a young government doctor*
MARTHA BABAKINA, *a young widow, owner of an estate and daughter of a rich merchant*
KOSICH, *an exciseman*
MICHAEL BORKIN, *a distant relative of Ivanoff, and manager of his estate*
AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA, *an old woman*
GEORGE, *lives with the Lebedieffs*
FIRST GUEST
SECOND GUEST
THIRD GUEST
FOURTH GUEST
PETER, *a servant of Ivanoff*
GABRIEL, *a servant of Lebedieff*
GUESTS OF BOTH SEXES

The play takes place in one of the provinces of central Russia

IVANOFF

ACT I

The garden of IVANOFF'S *country place. On the left is a terrace and the façade of the house. One window is open. Below the terrace is a broad semicircular lawn, from which paths lead to right and left into a garden. On the right are several garden benches and tables. A lamp is burning on one of the tables. It is evening. As the curtain rises sounds of the piano and violoncello are heard.*

IVANOFF *is sitting at a table reading.*

BORKIN, *in top-boots and carrying a gun, comes in from the rear of the garden. He is a little tipsy. As he sees* IVANOFF *he comes toward him on tiptoe, and when he comes opposite him he stops and points the gun at his face.*

IVANOFF. [*Catches sight of* BORKIN. *Shudders and jumps to his feet*] Misha! What are you doing? You frightened me! I can't stand your stupid jokes when I am so nervous as this. And having frightened me, you laugh! [*He sits down.*

BORKIN. [*Laughing loudly*] There, I am sorry, really. I won't do it again. Indeed I won't. [*Takes off his cap*] How hot it is! Just think, my dear boy, I have covered twelve miles in the last three hours. I am worn out. Just feel how my heart is beating.

IVANOFF. [*Goes on reading*] Oh, very well. I shall feel it later!

BORKIN. No, feel it now. [*He takes* IVANOFF'S *hand and presses it against his breast*] Can you feel it thumping? That means that it is weak and that I may die suddenly at any moment. Would you be sorry if I died?

IVANOFF. I am reading now. I shall attend to you later.

BORKIN. No, seriously, would you be sorry if I died? Nicholas, would you be sorry if I died?

IVANOFF. Leave me alone!

BORKIN. Come, tell me if you would be sorry or not.

IVANOFF. I am sorry that you smell so of vodka, Misha, it is disgusting.

BORKIN. Do I smell of vodka? How strange! And yet, it is not so strange after all. I met the magistrate on the road, and I must admit that we did drink about eight glasses together. Strictly speaking, of course, drinking is very harmful. Listen, it is harmful, isn't it? Is it? Is it?

IVANOFF. This is unendurable! Let me warn you, Misha, that you are going too far.

BORKIN. Well, well, excuse me. Sit here by yourself then, for heaven's sake, if it amuses you. [*Gets up and goes away*] What extraordinary people one meets in the world. They won't even allow themselves to be spoken to. [*He comes back*] Oh, yes, I nearly forgot. Please let me have eighty-two roubles.

IVANOFF. Why do you want eighty-two roubles?

BORKIN. To pay the workmen to-morrow.

IVANOFF. I haven't the money.

BORKIN. Many thanks. [*Angrily*] So you haven't the money! And yet the workmen must be paid, mustn't they?

IVANOFF. I don't know. Wait till my salary comes in on the first of the month.

BORKIN. How is it possible to discuss anything with a man like you? Can't you understand that the workmen are coming to-morrow morning and not on the first of the month?

IVANOFF. How can I help it? I'll be hanged if I can do anything about it now. And what do you mean by this irritating way you have of pestering me whenever I am trying to read or write or——

BORKIN. Must the workmen be paid or not, I ask you? But, good gracious! What is the use of talking to you! [*Waves his hand*] Do you think because you own an estate you can command the whole world? With your two thousand acres and your empty pockets you are like a man who has a cellar full of wine and no corkscrew. I have sold the oats as they stand in the field. Yes, sir! And to-morrow I shall sell the rye and the carriage horses. [*He stamps up and down*] Do you think I am going to stand upon ceremony with you? Certainly not! I am not that kind of a man!

ANNA *appears at the open window.*

ANNA. Whose voice did I hear just now? Was it yours, Misha? Why are you stamping up and down?

BORKIN. Anybody who had anything to do with your Nicholas would stamp up and down.

ANNA. Listen, Misha! Please have some hay carried onto the croquet lawn.

BORKIN. [*Waves his hand*] Leave me alone, please!

ANNA. Oh, what manners! They are not becoming to you at all. If you want to be liked by women you must never let them see you when you are angry or obstinate. [*To her husband*] Nicholas, let us go and play on the lawn in the hay!

IVANOFF. Don't you know it is bad for you to stand at the open window, Annie? [*Calls*] Shut the window, Uncle!

[*The window is shut from the inside.*

BORKIN. Don't forget that the interest on the money you owe Lebedieff must be paid in two days.

IVANOFF. I haven't forgotten it. I am going over to see Lebedieff to-day and shall ask him to wait

[*He looks at his watch.*

BORKIN. When are you going?

IVANOFF. At once.

BORKIN. Wait! Wait! Isn't this Sasha's birthday? So it is! The idea of my forgetting it. What a memory I have. [*Jumps about*] I shall go with you! [*Sings*] I shall go, I shall go! Nicholas, old man, you are the joy of my life. If you were not always so nervous and cross and gloomy, you and I could do great things together. I would do anything for you. Shall I marry Martha Babakina and give you half her fortune? That is, not half, either, but all—take it all!

IVANOFF. Enough of this nonsense!

BORKIN. No, seriously, shan't I marry Martha and halve the money with you? But no, why should I propose it? How can you understand? [*Angrily*] You say to me: "Stop talking nonsense!" You are a good man and a clever one, but you haven't any red blood in your veins or any—well, enthusiasm. Why, if you wanted to, you and I could cut a dash together that would shame the devil himself. If you were a normal man instead of a morbid hypochondriac we would have a million in a year. For instance, if I had twenty-three hundred roubles now I could make twenty thousand in two weeks. You don't believe me? You think it is all nonsense? No, it isn't nonsense. Give me twenty-three hundred roubles and let me try. Ofsianoff is selling a strip of land across the river for that price. If we buy this, both banks will be ours, and we shall have the right to build a dam across the river. Isn't that so? We can say that we intend to build a mill, and when the people on the river below us hear that we mean to dam the river they will, of course, object violently and we shall say: If you don't

want a dam here you will have to pay to get us away. Do you see the result? The factory would give us five thousand roubles, Korolkoff three thousand, the monastery five thousand more——

IVANOFF. All that is simply idiotic, Misha. If you don't want me to lose my temper you must keep your schemes to yourself.

BORKIN. [*Sits down at the table*] Of course! I knew how it would be! You never will act for yourself, and you tie my hands so that I am helpless.

Enter SHABELSKI *and* LVOFF.

SHABELSKI. The only difference between lawyers and doctors is that lawyers simply rob you, whereas doctors both rob you and kill you. I am not referring to any one present. [*Sits down on the bench*] They are all frauds and swindlers. Perhaps in Arcadia you might find an exception to the general rule and yet—I have treated thousands of sick people myself in my life, and I have never met a doctor who did not seem to me to be an unmistakable scoundrel.

BORKIN. [*To* IVANOFF] Yes, you tie my hands and never do anything for yourself, and that is why you have no money.

SHABELSKI. As I said before, I am not referring to any one here at present; there may be exceptions though, after all—

[*He yawns.*

IVANOFF. [*Shuts his book*] What have you to tell me, doctor?

LVOFF. [*Looks toward the window*] Exactly what I said this morning: she must go to the Crimea at once.

[*Walks up and down.*

SHABELSKI. [*Bursts out laughing*] To the Crimea! Why don't you and I set up as doctors, Misha? Then, if some Madame Angot or Ophelia finds the world tiresome and begins to cough and be consumptive, all we shall have to

do will be to write out a prescription according to the laws of medicine: that is, first, we shall order her a young doctor, and then a journey to the Crimea. There some fascinating young Tartar——

IVANOFF. [*Interrupting*] Oh, don't be coarse! [*To* LVOFF] It takes money to go to the Crimea, and even if I could afford it, you know she has refused to go.

LVOFF. Yes, she has. [*A pause.*

BORKIN. Look here, doctor, is Anna really so ill that she absolutely must go to the Crimea?

LVOFF. [*Looking toward the window*] Yes, she has consumption.

BORKIN. Whew! How sad! I have seen in her face for some time that she could not last much longer.

LVOFF. Can't you speak quietly? She can hear everything you say. [*A pause.*

BORKIN. [*Sighing*] The life of man is like a flower, blooming so gaily in a field. Then, along comes a goat, he eats it, and the flower is gone!

SHABELSKI. Oh, nonsense, nonsense. [*Yawning*] Everything is a fraud and a swindle. [*A pause.*

BORKIN. Gentlemen, I have been trying to tell Nicholas how he can make some money, and have submitted a brilliant plan to him, but my seed, as usual, has fallen on barren soil. Look what a sight he is now: dull, cross, bored, peevish——

SHABELSKI. [*Gets up and stretches himself*] You are always inventing schemes for everybody, you clever fellow, and telling them how to live; can't you tell me something? Give me some good advice, you ingenious young man. Show me a good move to make.

BORKIN. [*Getting up*] I am going to have a swim. Goodbye, gentlemen. [*To Shabelski*] There are at least twenty

good moves you could make. If I were you I should have twenty thousand roubles in a week.

[*He goes out;* SHABELSKI *follows him.*

SHABELSKI. How would you do it? Come, explain.

BORKIN. There is nothing to explain, it is so simple. [*Coming back*] Nicholas, give me a rouble.

IVANOFF *silently hands him the money.*

BORKIN. Thanks. Shabelski, you still hold some trump cards.

SHABELSKI *follows him out.*

SHABELSKI. Well, what are they?

BORKIN. If I were you I should have thirty thousand roubles and more in a week. [*They go out together.*

IVANOFF. [*After a pause*] Useless people, useless talk, and the necessity of answering stupid questions, have wearied me so, doctor, that I am ill. I have become so irritable and bitter that I don't know myself. My head aches for days at a time. I hear a ringing in my ears, I can't sleep, and yet there is no escape from it all, absolutely none.

LVOFF. Ivanoff, I have something serious to speak to you about.

IVANOFF. What is it?

LVOFF. It is about your wife. She refuses to go to the Crimea alone, but she would go with you.

IVANOFF. [*Thoughtfully*] It would cost a great deal for us both to go, and besides, I could not get leave to be away for so long. I have had one holiday already this year.

LVOFF. Very well, let us admit that. Now to proceed. The best cure for consumption is absolute peace of mind, and your wife has none whatever. She is forever excited by your behaviour to her. Forgive me, I am excited and am going to speak frankly. Your treatment of her is killing her. [*A pause*] Ivanoff, let me believe better things of you.

IVANOFF. What you say is true, true. I must be terribly guilty, but my mind is confused. My will seems to be paralysed by a kind of stupor; I can't understand myself or any one else. [*Looks toward the window*] Come, let us take a walk, we might be overheard here. [*They get up*] My dear friend, you should hear the whole story from the beginning if it were not so long and complicated that to tell it would take all night. [*They walk up and down*] Anna is a splendid, an exceptional woman. She has left her faith, her parents, and her fortune for my sake. If I should demand a hundred other sacrifices, she would consent to every one without the quiver of an eyelid. Well, I am not a remarkable man in any way, and have sacrificed nothing. However, the story is a long one. In short, the whole point is, my dear doctor— [*Confused*] that I married her for love and promised to love her forever, and now after five years she loves me still and I— [*He waves his hand*] Now, when you tell me she is dying, I feel neither love nor pity, only a sort of loneliness and weariness. To all appearances this must seem horrible, and I cannot understand myself what is happening to me. [*They go out.*

SHABELSKI *comes in.*

SHABELSKI. [*Laughing*] Upon my word, that man is no scoundrel, but a great thinker, a master-mind. He deserves a memorial. He is the essence of modern ingenuity, and combines in himself alone the genius of the lawyer, the doctor, and the financier. [*He sits down on the lowest step of the terrace*] And yet he has never finished a course of studies in any college; that is so surprising. What an ideal scoundrel he would have made if he had acquired a little culture and mastered the sciences! "You could make twenty thousand roubles in a week," he said. "You still hold the ace of trumps: it is your title." [*Laughing*] He said I might get a

rich girl to marry me for it! [ANNA *opens the window and looks down*] "Let me make a match between you and Martha," says he. Who is this Martha? It must be that Balabalkina—Babakalkina woman, the one that looks like a laundress.

ANNA. Is that you, Count?

SHABELSKI. What do you want?

ANNA *laughs.*

SHABELSKI. [*With a Jewish accent*] Vy do you laugh?

ANNA. I was thinking of something you said at dinner, do you remember? How was it—a forgiven thief, a doctored horse——

SHABELSKI. A forgiven thief, a doctored horse, and a Christianised Jew are all worth the same price.

ANNA. [*Laughing*] You can't even repeat the simplest saying without ill-nature. You are a most malicious old man. [*Seriously*] Seriously, Count you are extremely disagreeable, and very tiresome and painful to live with. You are always grumbling and growling, and everybody to you is a blackguard and a scoundrel. Tell me honestly, Count, have you ever spoken well of any one?

SHABELSKI. Is this an inquisition?

ANNA. We have lived under this same roof now for five years, and I have never heard you speak kindly of people, or without bitterness and derision. What harm has the world done to you? Is it possible that you consider yourself better than any one else?

SHABELSKI. Not at all. I think we are all of us scoundrels and hypocrites. I myself am a degraded old man, and as useless as a cast-off shoe. I abuse myself as much as any one else. I was rich once, and free, and happy at times, but now I am a dependent, an object of charity, a joke to the world. When I am at last exasperated and defy them, they

answer me with a laugh. When I laugh, they shake their heads sadly and say, "The old man has gone mad." But oftenest of all I am unheard and unnoticed by every one.

ANNA. [*Quietly*] Screaming again.

SHABELSKI. Who is screaming?

ANNA. The owl. It screams every evening.

SHABELSKI. Let it scream. Things are as bad as they can be already. [*Stretches himself*] Alas, my dear Sarah! If I could only win a thousand or two roubles, I should soon show you what I could do. I wish you could see me! I should get away out of this hole, and leave the bread of charity, and should not show my nose here again until the last judgment day.

ANNA. What would you do if you were to win so much money?

SHABELSKI. [*Thoughtfully*] First I would go to Moscow to hear the Gipsies play, and then—then I should fly to Paris and take an apartment and go to the Russian Church.

ANNA. And what else?

SHABELSKI. I would go and sit on my wife's grave for days and days and think. I would sit there until I died. My wife is buried in Paris. [*A pause.*

ANNA. How terribly dull this is! Shall we play a duet?

SHABELSKI. As you like. Go and get the music ready.

[ANNA *goes out*

IVANOFF *and* LVOFF *appear in one of the paths.*

IVANOFF. My dear friend, you left college last year, and you are still young and brave. Being thirty-five years old, I have the right to advise you. Don't marry a Jewess or a bluestocking or a woman who is queer in any way. Choose some nice, common-place girl without any strange and startling points in her character. Plan your life for quiet; the greyer and more monotonous you can make the back-

ground, the better. My dear boy, do not try to fight alone against thousands; do not tilt with windmills; do not dash yourself against the rocks. And, above all, may you be spared the so-called rational life, all wild theories and impassioned talk. Everything is in the hands of God, so shut yourself up in your shell and do your best. That is the pleasant, honest, healthy way to live. But the life I have chosen has been so tiring, oh, so tiring! So full of mistakes, of injustice and stupidity! [*Catches sight of* SHABELSKI, *and speaks angrily*] There you are again, Uncle, always under foot, never letting one have a moment's quiet talk!

SHABELSKI. [*In a tearful voice*] Is there no refuge anywhere for a poor old devil like me?

[*He jumps up and runs into the house.*

IVANOFF. Now I have offended him! Yes, my nerves have certainly gone to pieces. I must do something about it, I must——

LVOFF. [*Excitedly*] Ivanoff, I have heard all you have to say and—and—I am going to speak frankly. You have shown me in your voice and manner, as well as in your words, the most heartless egotism and pitiless cruelty. Your nearest friend is dying simply because she is near you, her days are numbered, and you can feel such indifference that you go about giving advice and analysing your feelings. I cannot say all I should like to; I have not the gift of words, but—but I can at least say that you are deeply antipathetic to me.

IVANOFF. I suppose I am. As an onlooker, of course you see me more clearly than I see myself, and your judgment of me is probably right. No doubt I am terribly guilty. [*Listens*] I think I hear the carriage coming. I must get ready to go. [*He goes toward the house and then stops*] You dislike me, doctor, and you don't conceal it. Your sincerity does you credit. [*He goes into the house.*

LVOFF. [*Alone*] What a confoundedly disagreeable character! I have let another opportunity slip without speaking to him as I meant to, but I simply cannot talk calmly to that man. The moment I open my mouth to speak I feel such a commotion and suffocation here [*He puts his hand on his breast*] that my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. Oh, I loathe that Tartuffe, that unmitigated rascal, with all my heart! There he is, preparing to go driving in spite of the entreaties of his unfortunate wife, who adores him and whose only happiness is his presence. She implores him to spend at least one evening with her, and he cannot even do that. Why, he might shoot himself in despair if he had to stay at home! Poor fellow, what he wants are new fields for his villainous schemes. Oh, I know why you go to Lebedieff's every evening, Ivanoff! I know.

Enter IVANOFF, *in hat and coat,* ANNA, *and* SHABELSKI.

SHABELSKI. Look here, Nicholas, this is simply barbarous. You go away every evening and leave us here alone, and we get so bored that we have to go to bed at eight o'clock. It is a scandal, and no decent way of living. Why can you go driving if we can't? Why?

ANNA. Leave him alone, Count. Let him go if he wants to.

IVANOFF. How can a sick woman like you go anywhere? You know you have a cough and must not go out after sunset. Ask the doctor here. You are no child, Annie, you must be reasonable. And as for you, what would you do with yourself over there?

SHABELSKI. I am ready to go anywhere: into the jaws of a crocodile, or even into the jaws of hell, so long as I don't have to stay here. I am horribly bored. I am stupefied by this dullness. Every one here is tired of me. You leave me at home to entertain Anna, but I feel more like scratching and biting her.

ANNA. Leave him alone, Count. Leave him alone. Let him go if he enjoys himself there.

IVANOFF. What does this mean, Annie? You know I am not going for pleasure. I must see Lebedieff about the money I owe him.

ANNA. I don't see why you need justify yourself to me. Go ahead! Who is keeping you?

IVANOFF. Heavens! Don't let us bite one another's heads off. Is that really unavoidable?

SHABELSKI. [*Tearfully*] Nicholas, my dear boy, do please take me with you. I might possibly be amused a little by the sight of all the fools and scoundrels I should see there. You know I haven't been off this place since Easter.

IVANOFF. [*Exasperated*] Oh, very well! Come along then! How tiresome you all are!

SHABELSKI. I may go? Oh, thank you! [*Takes him gaily by the arm and leads him aside*] May I wear your straw hat?

IVANOFF. You may, only hurry, please.

SHABELSKI *runs into the house.*

IVANOFF. How tired I am of you all! But no, what am I saying? Annie, my manner to you is insufferable, and it never used to be. Well, good-bye, Annie. I shall be back by one.

ANNA. Nicholas! My dear husband, stay at home to-night!

IVANOFF. [*Excitedly*] Darling, sweetheart, my dear, unhappy one, I implore you to let me leave home in the evenings. I know it is cruel and unjust to ask this, but let me do you this injustice. It is such torture for me to stay. As soon as the sun goes down my soul is overwhelmed by the most horrible despair. Don't ask me why; I don't know; I swear I don't. This dreadful melancholy torments me here, it drives me to the Lebedieff's and there it grows worse

than ever. I rush home; it still pursues me; and so I am tortured all through the night. It is breaking my heart.

ANNA. Nicholas, won't you stay? We will talk together as we used to. We will have supper together and read afterward. The old grumbler and I have learned so many duets to play to you. [*She kisses him. Then, after a pause*] I can't understand you any more. This has been going on for a year now. What has changed you so?

IVANOFF. I don't know.

ANNA. And why don't you want me to go driving with you in the evening?

IVANOFF. As you insist on knowing, I shall have to tell you. It is a little cruel, but you had best understand. When this melancholy fit is on me I begin to dislike you, Annie, and at such times I must escape from you. In short, I simply have to leave this house.

ANNA. Oh, you are sad, are you? I can understand that! Nicholas, let me tell you something: won't you try to sing and laugh and scold as you used to? Stay here, and we will drink some liqueur together, and laugh, and chase away this sadness of yours in no time. Shall I sing to you? Or shall we sit in your study in the twilight as we used to, while you tell me about your sadness? I can read such suffering in your eyes! Let me look into them and weep, and our hearts will both be lighter. [*She laughs and cries at once*] Or is it really true that the flowers return with every spring, but lost happiness never returns? Oh, is it? Well, go then, go!

IVANOFF. Pray for me, Annie! [*He goes; then stops and thinks for a moment*] No, I can't do it. [IVANOFF *goes out.*

ANNA. Yes, go, go— [*Sits down at the table.*

LVOFF. [*Walking up and down*] Make this a rule, Madam: as soon as the sun goes down you must go indoors and not

come out again until morning. The damp evening air is bad for you.

ANNA. Yes, sir!

LVOFF. What do you mean by "Yes, sir"? I am speaking seriously.

ANNA. But I don't want to be serious. [*She coughs.*

LVOFF. There now, you see, you are coughing already.

SHABELSKI *comes out of the house in his hat and coat.*

SHABELSKI. Where is Nicholas? Is the carriage here yet? [*Goes quickly to* ANNA *and kisses her hand*] Good-night, my darling! [*Makes a face and speaks with a Jewish accent*] I beg your bardon! [*He goes quickly out.*

LVOFF. Idiot!

A pause; the sounds of a concertina are heard in the distance.

ANNA. Oh, how lonely it is! The coachman and the cook are having a little ball in there by themselves, and I—I am, as it were, abandoned. Why are you walking about, Doctor? Come and sit down here.

LVOFF. I can't sit down. [*A pause.*

ANNA. They are playing "The Sparrow" in the kitchen. [*She sings*]

"Sparrow, Sparrow, where are you?
On the mountain drinking dew."

[*A pause*] Are your father and mother living, Doctor?

LVOFF. My mother is living; my father is dead.

ANNA. Do you miss your mother very much?

LVOFF. I am too busy to miss any one.

ANNA. [*Laughing*] The flowers return with every spring, but lost happiness never returns. I wonder who taught me that? I think it was Nicholas himself. [*Listens*] The owl is hooting again.

LVOFF. Well, let it hoot.

ANNA. I have begun to think, Doctor, that fate has cheated me. Other people who, perhaps, are no better than I am are happy and have not had to pay for their happiness. But I have paid for it all, every moment of it, and such a price! Why should I have to pay so terribly? Dear friend, you are all too considerate and gentle with me to tell me the truth; but do you think I don't know what is the matter with me? I know perfectly well. However, this isn't a pleasant subject—[*With a Jewish accent*] "I beg your bardon!" Can you tell funny stories?

LVOFF. No, I can't.

ANNA. Nicholas can. I am beginning to be surprised, too, at the injustice of people. Why do they return hatred for love, and answer truth with lies? Can you tell me how much longer I shall be hated by my mother and father? They live fifty miles away, and yet I can feel their hatred day and night, even in my sleep. And how do you account for the sadness of Nicholas? He says that he only dislikes me in the evening, when the fit is on him. I understand that, and can tolerate it, but what if he should come to dislike me altogether? Of course that is impossible, and yet—no, no, I mustn't even imagine such a thing. [*Sings*]

"Sparrow, Sparrow, where are you?"

[*She shudders*] What fearful thoughts I have! You are not married, Doctor; there are many things that you cannot understand.

LVOFF. You say you are surprised, but—but it is you who surprise me. Tell me, explain to me how you, an honest and intelligent woman, almost a saint, could allow yourself to be so basely deceived and dragged into this den of bears? Why are you here? What have you in common with such a cold

and heartless—but enough of your husband! What have you in common with these wicked and vulgar surroundings? With that eternal grumbler, the crazy and decrepit Count? With that swindler, that prince of rascals, Misha, with his fool's face? Tell me, I say, how did you get here?

ANNA. [*Laughing*] That is what he used to say, long ago, oh, exactly! Only his eyes are larger than yours, and when he was excited they used to shine like coals—go on, go on!

LVOFF. [*Gets up and waves his hand*] There is nothing more to say. Go into the house.

ANNA. You say that Nicholas is not what he should be, that his faults are so and so. How can you possibly understand him? How can you learn to know any one in six months? He is a wonderful man, Doctor, and I am sorry you could not have known him as he was two or three years ago. He is depressed and silent now, and broods all day without doing anything, but he was splendid then. I fell in love with him at first sight. [*Laughing*] I gave one look and was caught like a mouse in a trap! So when he asked me to go with him I cut every tie that bound me to my old life as one snips the withered leaves from a plant. But things are different now. Now he goes to the Lebedieff's to amuse himself with other women, and I sit here in the garden and listen to the owls. [*The* WATCHMAN'S *rattle is heard*] Tell me, Doctor, have you any brothers and sisters?

LVOFF. No.

ANNA *sobs.*

LVOFF. What is it? What is the matter?

ANNA. I can't stand it, Doctor, I must go.

LVOFF. Where?

ANNA. To him. I am going. Have the horses harnessed.

[*She runs into the house.*

LVOFF. No, I certainly cannot go on treating any one

under these conditions. I not only have to do it for nothing, but I am forced to endure this agony of mind besides. No, no, I can't stand it. I have had enough of it.

[*He goes into the house.*

The curtain falls.

ACT II

The drawing-room of LEBEDIEFF'S *house. In the centre is a door leading into a garden. Doors open out of the room to the right and left. The room is furnished with valuable old furniture, which is carefully protected by linen covers. The walls are hung with pictures. The room is lighted by candelabra.* ZINAIDA *is sitting on a sofa; the elderly guests are sitting in arm-chairs on either hand. The young guests are sitting about the room on small chairs.* KOSICH, AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA, GEORGE, *and others are playing cards in the background.* GABRIEL *is standing near the door on the right. The maid is passing sweetmeats about on a tray. During the entire act guests come and go from the garden, through the room, out of the door on the left, and back again. Enter* MARTHA *through the door on the right. She goes toward* ZINAIDA.

ZINAIDA. [*Gaily*] My dearest Martha!

MARTHA. How do you do, Zinaida? Let me congratulate you on your daughter's birthday.

ZINAIDA. Thank you, my dear; I am delighted to see you. How are you?

MARTHA. Very well indeed, thank you. [*She sits down on the sofa*] Good evening, young people!

The younger guests get up and bow.

FIRST GUEST. [*Laughing*] Young people indeed! Do you call yourself an old person?

MARTHA. [*Sighing*] How can I make any pretense to youth now?

First Guest. What nonsense! The fact that you are a widow means nothing. You could beat any pretty girl you chose at a canter.

Gabriel *brings* Martha *some tea.*

Zinaida. Why do you bring the tea in like that? Go and fetch some jam to eat with it!

Martha. No thank you; none for me, don't trouble yourself. [*A pause.*

First Guest. [*To* Martha] Did you come through Mushkine on your way here?

Martha. No, I came by way of Spassk. The road is better that way.

First Guest. Yes, so it is.

Kosich. Two in spades.

George. Pass.

Avdotia. Pass.

Second Guest. Pass.

Martha. The price of lottery tickets has gone up again, my dear. I have never known such a state of affairs. The first issue is already worth two hundred and seventy and the second nearly two hundred and fifty. This has never happened before.

Zinaida. How fortunate for those who have a great many tickets!

Martha. Don't say that, dear; even when the price of tickets is high it does not pay to put one's capital into them.

Zinaida. Quite true, and yet, my dear, one never can tell what may happen. Providence is sometimes kind.

Third Guest. My impression is, ladies, that at present capital is exceedingly unproductive. Shares pay very small dividends, and speculating is exceedingly dangerous. As I understand it, the capitalist now finds himself in a more critical position than the man who——

MARTHA. Quite right.

FIRST GUEST *yawns.*

MARTHA. How dare you yawn in the presence of ladies?

FIRST GUEST. I beg your pardon! It was quite an accident.

ZINAIDA *gets up and goes out through the door on the right.*

GEORGE. Two in hearts.

SECOND GUEST. Pass.

KOSICH. Pass.

MARTHA. [*Aside*] Heavens! This is deadly! I shall die of ennui.

Enter ZINAIDA *and* LEBEDIEFF *through the door on the right.*

ZINAIDA. Why do you go off by yourself like a prima donna? Come and sit with our guests!

[*She sits down in her former place.*

LEBEDIEFF. [*Yawning*] Oh, dear, our sins are heavy! [*He catches sight of* MARTHA] Why, there is my little sugar-plum! How is your most esteemed highness?

MARTHA. Very well, thank you.

LEBEDIEFF. Splendid, splendid! [*He sits down in an armchair*] Quite right—Oh, Gabriel!

GABRIEL *brings him a glass of vodka and a tumbler of water. He empties the glass of vodka and sips the water.*

FIRST GUEST. Good health to you!

LEBEDIEFF. Good health is too much to ask. I am content to keep death from the door. [*To his wife*] Where is the heroine of this occasion, Zuzu?

KOSICH. [*In a plaintive voice*] Look here, why haven't we taken any tricks yet? [*He jumps up*] Yes, why have we lost this game entirely, confound it?

AVDOTIA. [*Jumps up angrily*] Because, friend, you don't know how to play it, and have no right to be sitting here at

all. What right had you to lead from another suit? Haven't you the ace left? [*They both leave the table and run forward.*

KOSICH. [*In a tearful voice*] Ladies and gentlemen, let me explain! I had the ace, king, queen, and eight of diamonds, the ace of spades and one, just one, little heart, do you understand? Well, she, bad luck to her, she couldn't make a little slam. I said one in no-trumps——*

AVDOTIA. [*Interrupting him*] No, I said one in no-trumps; you said two in no-trumps——

KOSICH. This is unbearable! Allow me—you had—I had —you had— [*To* LEBEDIEFF] But you shall decide it, Paul: I had the ace, king, queen, and eight of diamonds——

LEBEDIEFF. [*Puts his fingers into his ears*] Stop, for heaven's sake, stop!

AVDOTIA. [*Yelling*] I said no-trumps, and not he!

KOSICH. [*Furiously*] I'll be damned if I ever sit down to another game of cards with that old cat!

He rushes into the garden. The SECOND GUEST *follows him.* GEORGE *is left alone at the table.*

AVDOTIA. Whew! He makes my blood boil! Old cat, indeed! You're an old cat yourself!

MARTHA. How angry you are, aunty!

AVDOTIA. [*Sees* MARTHA *and claps her hands*] Are you here, my darling? My beauty! And was I blind as a bat, and didn't see you? Darling child! [*She kisses her and sits down beside her*] How happy this makes me! Let me feast my eyes on you, my milk-white swan! Oh, oh, you have bewitched me!

LEBEDIEFF. Why don't you find her a husband instead of singing her praises?

AVDOTIA. He shall be found. I shall not go to my grave before I have found a husband for her, and one for Sasha too.

*The game played is vint, the national card-game of Russia and the direct ancestor of auction bridge, with which it is almost identical.

I shall not go to my grave— [*She sighs*] But where to find these husbands nowadays? There sit some possible bridegrooms now, huddled together like a lot of half-drowned rats!

THIRD GUEST. A most unfortunate comparison! It is my belief, ladies, that if the young men of our day prefer to remain single, the fault lies not with them, but with the existing social conditions.

LEBEDIEFF. Come, enough of that! Don't give us any more philosophy; I don't like it!

Enter SASHA. *She goes up to her father.*

SASHA. How can you endure the stuffy air of this room when the weather is so beautiful?

ZINAIDA. My dear Sasha, don't you see that Martha is here?

SASHA. I beg your pardon.

[*She goes up to* MARTHA *and shakes hands.*

MARTHA. Yes, here I am, my dear little Sasha, and proud to congratulate you. [*They kiss each other*] Many happy returns of the day, dear!

SASHA. Thank you! [*She goes and sits down by her father.*

LEBEDIEFF. As you were saying, Avdotia Nazarovna, husbands are hard to find. I don't want to be rude, but I must say that the young men of the present are a dull and poky lot, poor fellows! They can't dance or talk or drink as they should do.

AVDOTIA. Oh, as far as drinking goes, they are all experts. Just give them—give them——

LEBEDIEFF. Simply to drink is no art. A horse can drink. No, it must be done in the right way. In my young days we used to sit and cudgel our brains all day over our lessons, but as soon as evening came we would fly off on some spree and keep it up till dawn. How we used to dance and flirt, and drink, too! Or sometimes we would sit and chatter and discuss everything under the sun until we almost wagged our

tongues off. But now— [*He waves his hand*] Boys are a puzzle to me. They are not willing either to give a candle to God or a pitchfork to the devil! There is only one young fellow in the country who is worth a penny, and he is married. [*Sighs*] They say, too, that he is going crazy.

MARTHA. Who is he?

LEBEDIEFF. Nicholas Ivanoff.

MARTHA. Yes, he is a fine fellow, only [*Makes a face*] he is very unhappy.

ZINAIDA. How could he be otherwise, poor boy! [*She sighs*] He made such a bad mistake. When he married that Jewess of his he thought of course that her parents would give away whole mountains of gold with her, but, on the contrary, on the day she became a Christian they disowned her, and Ivanoff has never seen a penny of the money. He has repented of his folly now, but it is too late.

SASHA. Mother, that is not true!

MARTHA. How can you say it is not true, Sasha, when we all know it to be a fact? Why did he have to marry a Jewess? He must have had some reason for doing it. Are Russian girls so scarce? No, he made a mistake, poor fellow, a sad mistake. [*Excitedly*] And what on earth can he do with her now? Where could she go if he were to come home some day and say: "Your parents have deceived me; leave my house at once!" Her parents wouldn't take her back. She might find a place as a house-maid if she had ever learned to work, which she hasn't. He worries and worries her now, but the Count interferes. If it had not been for the Count, he would have worried her to death long ago.

AVDOTIA. They say he shuts her up in a cellar and stuffs her with garlic, and she eats and eats until her very soul reeks of it. [*Laughter.*

SASHA. But, father, you know that isn't true!

LEBEDIEFF. What if it isn't, Sasha? Let them spin yarns if it amuses them. [*He calls*] Gabriel!

GABRIEL *brings him another glass of vodka and a glass of water.*

ZINAIDA. His misfortunes have almost ruined him, poor man. His affairs are in a frightful condition. If Borkin did not take such good charge of his estate he and his Jewess would soon be starving to death. [*She sighs*] And what anxiety he has caused us! Heaven only knows how we have suffered. Do you realise, my dear, that for three years he has owed us nine thousand roubles?

MARTHA. [*Horrified*] Nine thousand!

ZINAIDA. Yes, that is the sum that my dear Paul has undertaken to lend him. He never knows to whom it is safe to lend money and to whom it is not. I don't worry about the principal, but he ought to pay the interest on his debt.

SASHA. [*Hotly*] Mamma, you have already discussed this subject at least a thousand times!

ZINAIDA. What difference does it make to you? Why should you interfere?

SASHA. What is this mania you all have for gossiping about a man who has never done any of you any harm? Tell me, what harm has he done you?

THIRD GUEST. Let me say two words, Miss Sasha. I esteem Ivanoff, and have always found him an honourable man, but, between ourselves, I also consider him an adventurer.

SASHA. I congratulate you on your opinion!

THIRD GUEST. In proof of its truth, permit me to present to you the following facts, as they were communicated to me by his secretary, or shall I say rather, by his factotum, Borkin. Two years ago, at the time of the cattle plague, he bought some cattle and had them insured—

ZINAIDA. Yes, I remember hearing of that.

THIRD GUEST. He had them insured, as you understand, and then inoculated them with the disease and claimed the insurance.

SASHA. Oh, what nonsense, nonsense, nonsense! No one bought or inoculated any cattle! The story was invented by Borkin, who then went about boasting of his clever plan. Ivanoff would not forgive Borkin for two weeks after he heard of it. He is only guilty of a weak character and too great faith in humanity. He can't make up his mind to get rid of that Borkin, and so all his possessions have been tricked and stolen from him. Every one who has had anything to do with Ivanoff has taken advantage of his generosity to grow rich.

LEBEDIEFF. Sasha, you little firebrand, that will do!

SASHA. Why do you all talk like this? This eternal subject of Ivanoff, Ivanoff, and always Ivanoff has grown insufferable, and yet you never speak of anything else. [*She goes toward the door, then stops and comes back*] I am surprised, [*To the young men*] and utterly astonished at your patience, young men! How can you sit there like that? Aren't you bored? Why, the very air is as dull as ditchwater! Do, for heaven's sake say something; try to amuse the girls a little; move about! Or if you can't talk of anything except Ivanoff, you might laugh or sing or dance——

LEBEDIEFF. [*Laughing*] That's right, Sasha! Give them a good scolding.

SASHA. Look here, will you do me a favour? If you refuse to dance or sing or laugh, if all that is tedious, then let me beg you, implore you, to summon all your powers, if only for this once, and make one witty or clever remark. Let it be as impertinent and malicious as you like, so long as it is funny and original. Won't you perform this miracle, just once, to sur-

prise us and make us laugh? Or else you might think of some little thing which you could all do together, something to make you stir about. Let the girls admire you for once in their lives! Listen to me! I suppose you want them to like you? Then why don't try to make them do it? Oh, dear! There is something wrong with you all! You are a lot of sleepy stick-in-the-muds! I have told you so a thousand times and shall always go on repeating it; there is something wrong with every one of you; something wrong, wrong, wrong!

Enter IVANOFF *and* SHABELSKI *through the door on the right.*

SHABELSKI. Who is making a speech here? Is it you, Sasha? [*He laughs and shakes hands with her*] Many happy returns of the day, my dear child. May you live as long as possible in this life, but never be born again!

ZINAIDA. [*Joyfully*] My dear Count!

LEBEDIEFF. Who can this be? Not you, Count?

SHABELSKI. [*Sees* ZINAIDA *and* MARTHA *sitting side by side*] Two gold mines side by side! What a pleasant picture it makes! [*He shakes hands with* ZINAIDA] Good evening, Zuzu! [*Shakes hands with* MARTHA] Good evening, Birdie!

ZINAIDA. I am charmed to see you, Count. You are a rare visitor here now. [*Calls*] Gabriel, bring some tea! Please sit down.

She gets up and goes to the door and back, evidently much preoccupied. SASHA *sits down in her former place.* IVANOFF *silently shakes hands with every one.*

LEBEDIEFF. [*To* SHABELSKI] What miracle has brought you here? You have given us a great surprise. Why, Count, you're a rascal, you haven't been treating us right at all. [*Leads him forward by the hand*] Tell me, why don't you ever come to see us now? Are you offended?

SHABELSKI. How can I get here to see you? Astride a

broomstick? I have no horses of my own, and Nicholas won't take me with him when he goes out. He says I must stay at home to amuse Sarah. Send your horses for me and I shall come with pleasure.

LEBEDIEFF. [*With a wave of the hand*] Oh, that is easy to say! But Zuzu would rather have a fit than lend the horses to any one. My dear, dear old friend, you are more to me than any one I know! You and I are survivors of those good old days that are gone forever, and you alone bring back to my mind the love and longings of my lost youth. Of course I am only joking, and yet, do you know, I am almost in tears?

SHABELSKI. Stop, stop! You smell like the air of a wine cellar.

LEBEDIEFF. Dear friend, you cannot imagine how lonely I am without my old companions! I could hang myself! [*Whispers*] Zuzu has frightened all the decent men away with her stingy ways, and now we have only this riff-raff, as you see: Tom, Dick, and Harry. However, drink your tea.

ZINAIDA. [*Anxiously, to* GABRIEL] Don't bring it in like that! Go fetch some jam to eat with it!

SHABELSKI. [*Laughing loudly, to* IVANOFF] Didn't I tell you so? [*To* LEBEDIEFF] I bet him driving over, that as soon as we arrived Zuzu would want to feed us with jam!

ZINAIDA. Still joking, Count! [*She sits down.*

LEBEDIEFF. She made twenty jars of it this year, and how else do you expect her to get rid of it?

SHABELSKI. [*Sits down near the table*] Are you still adding to the hoard, Zuzu? You will soon have a million, eh?

ZINAIDA. [*Sighing*] I know it seems as if no one could be richer than we, but where do they think the money comes from? It is all gossip.

SHABELSKI. Oh, yes, we all know that! We know how badly

you play your cards! Tell me, Paul, honestly, have you saved up a million yet?

LEBEDIEFF. I don't know. Ask Zuzu.

SHABELSKI. [*To* MARTHA] And my plump little Birdie here will soon have a million too! She is getting prettier and plumper not only every day, but every hour. That means she has a nice little fortune.

MARTHA. Thank you very much, your highness, but I don't like such jokes.

SHABELSKI. My dear little gold mine, do you call that a joke? It was a wail of the soul, a cry from the heart, that burst through my lips. My love for you and Zuzu is immense. [*Gaily*] Oh, rapture! Oh, bliss! I cannot look at you two without a madly beating heart!

ZINAIDA. You are still the same, Count. [*To* GEORGE] Put out the candles please, George. [GEORGE *gives a start. He puts out the candles and sits down again*] How is your wife, Nicholas?

IVANOFF. She is very ill. The doctor said to-day that she certainly had consumption.

ZINAIDA. Really? Oh, how sad! [*She sighs*] And we are all so fond of her!

SHABELSKI. What trash you all talk! That story was invented by that sham doctor, and is nothing but a trick of his. He wants to masquerade as an Æsculapius, and so has started this consumption theory. Fortunately her husband isn't jealous. [IVANOFF *makes an impatient gesture*] As for Sarah, I wouldn't trust a word or an action of hers. I have made a point all my life of mistrusting all doctors, lawyers, and women. They are shammers and deceivers.

LEBEDIEFF. [*To* SHABELSKI] You are an extraordinary person, Matthew! You have mounted this misanthropic hobby of yours, and you ride it through thick and thin like a

lunatic. You are a man like any other, and yet, from the way you talk one would imagine that you had the pip, or a cold in the head.

SHABELSKI. Would you have me go about kissing every rascal and scoundrel I meet?

LEBEDIEFF. Where do you find all these rascals and scoundrels?

SHABELSKI. Of course I am not talking of any one here present, nevertheless——

LEBEDIEFF. There you are again with your "nevertheless." All this is simply a fancy of yours.

SHABELSKI. A fancy? It is lucky for you that you have no knowledge of the world!

LEBEDIEFF. My knowledge of the world is this: I must sit here prepared at any moment to have death come knocking at the door. That is my knowledge of the world. At our age, brother, you and I can't afford to worry about knowledge of the world. So then— [*He calls*] Oh, Gabriel!

SHABELSKI. You have had quite enough already. Look at your nose.

LEBEDIEFF. No matter, old boy. I am not going to be married to-day.

ZINAIDA. Doctor Lvoff has not been here for a long time. He seems to have forgotten us.

SASHA. That man is one of my aversions. I can't stand his icy sense of honour. He can't ask for a glass of water or smoke a cigarette without making a display of his remarkable honesty. Walking and talking, it is written on his brow: "I am an honest man." He is a great bore.

SHABELSKI. He is a narrow-minded, conceited medico. [*Angrily*] He shrieks like a parrot at every step: "Make way for honest endeavour!" and thinks himself another St. Francis. Everybody is a rascal who doesn't make as much noise as he

does. As for his penetration, it is simply remarkable! If a peasant is well off and lives decently, he sees at once that he must be a thief and a scoundrel. If I wear a velvet coat and am dressed by my valet, I am a rascal and the valet is my slave. There is no place in this world for a man like him. I am actually afraid of him. Yes, indeed, he is likely, out of a sense of duty, to insult a man at any moment and to call him a knave.

IVANOFF. I am dreadfully tired of him, but I can't help liking him, too, he is so sincere.

SHABELSKI. Oh, yes, his sincerity is beautiful! He came up to me yesterday evening and remarked absolutely apropos of nothing: "Count, I have a deep aversion to you!" It isn't as if he said such things simply, but they are extremely pointed. His voice trembles, his eyes flash, his veins swell. Confound his infernal honesty! Supposing I am disgusting and odious to him? What is more natural? I know that I am, but I don't like to be told so to my face. I am a worthless old man, but he might have the decency to respect my grey hairs. Oh, what stupid, heartless honesty!

LEBEDIEFF. Come, come, you have been young yourself, and should make allowances for him.

SHABELSKI. Yes, I have been young and reckless; I have played the fool in my day and have seen plenty of knaves and scamps, but I have never called a thief a thief to his face, or talked of ropes in the house of a man who had been hung. I knew how to behave, but this idiotic doctor of yours would think himself in the seventh heaven of happiness if fate would allow him to pull my nose in public in the name of morality and human ideals.

LEBEDIEFF. Young men are all stubborn and restive. I had an uncle once who thought himself a philosopher. He would fill his house with guests, and after he had had a drink

he would get up on a chair, like this, and begin: "You ignoramuses! You powers of darkness! This is the dawn of a new life!" And so on and so on; he would preach and preach——

SASHA. And the guests?

LEBEDIEFF. They would just sit and listen and go on drinking. Once, though, I challenged him to a duel, challenged my own uncle! It came out of a discussion about Sir Francis Bacon. I was sitting, I remember, where Matthew is, and my uncle and the late Gerasim Nilitch were standing over there, about where Nicholas is now. Well, Gerasim Nilitch propounded this question——

Enter BORKIN. *He is dressed like a dandy and carries a parcel under his arm. He comes in singing and skipping through the door on the right. A murmur of approval is heard.*

THE GIRLS. Oh, Michael Borkin!

LEBEDIEFF. Hallo, Misha!

SHABELSKI. The soul of the company!

BORKIN. Here we are! [*He runs up to* SASHA] Most noble Signorina, let me be so bold as to wish to the whole world many happy returns of the birthday of such an exquisite flower as you! As a token of my enthusiasm let me presume to present you with these fireworks and this Bengal fire of my own manufacture. [*He hands her the parcel*] May they illuminate the night as brightly as you illuminate the shadows of this dark world. [*He spreads them out theatrically before her.*

SASHA. Thank you.

LEBEDIEFF. [*Laughing loudly, to* IVANOFF] Why don't you send this Judas packing?

BORKIN. [*To* LEBEDIEFF] My compliments to you, sir. [*To* IVANOFF] How are you, my patron? [*Sings*] Nicholas voilà, hey ho hey! [*He greets everybody in turn*] Most highly

honoured Zinaida! Oh, glorious Martha! Most ancient Avdotia! Noblest of Counts!

SHABELSKI. [*Laughing*] The life of the company! The moment he comes in the air feels livelier. Have you noticed it?

BORKIN. Whew! I am tired! I believe I have shaken hands with everybody. Well, ladies and gentlemen, haven't you some little tid-bit to tell me; something spicy? [*Speaking quickly to* ZINAIDA] Oh, aunty! I have something to tell you. As I was on my way here—[*To* GABRIEL] Some tea, please Gabriel, but without jam—as I was on my way here I saw some peasants down on the river-bank pulling the bark off the trees. Why don't you lease that meadow?

LEBEDIEFF. [*To* IVANOFF] Why don't you send that Judas away?

ZINAIDA. [*Startled*] Why, that is quite true! I never thought of it.

BORKIN. [*Swinging his arms*] I can't sit still! What tricks shall we be up to next, aunty? I am all on edge, Martha, absolutely exalted. [*He sings*]

"Once more I stand before thee!"

ZINAIDA. Think of something to amuse us, Misha, we are all bored.

BORKIN. Yes, you look so. What is the matter with you all? Why are you sitting there as solemn as a jury? Come, let us play something; what shall it be? Forfeits? Hide-and-seek? Tag? Shall we dance, or have the fireworks?

THE GIRLS. [*Clapping their hands*] The fireworks! The fireworks! [*They run into the garden.*

SASHA. [*To* IVANOFF] What makes you so depressed today?

IVANOFF. My head aches, little Sasha, and then I feel bored.

SASHA. Come into the sitting-room with me.

They go out through the door on the right. All the guests go into the garden and ZINAIDA *and* LEBEDIEFF *are left alone.*

ZINAIDA. That is what I like to see! A young man like Misha comes into the room and in a minute he has everybody laughing. [*She puts out the large lamp*] There is no reason the candles should burn for nothing so long as they are all in the garden. [*She blows out the candles.*

LEBEDIEFF. [*Following her*] We really ought to give our guests something to eat, Zuzu!

ZINAIDA. What crowds of candles; no wonder we are thought rich.

LEBEDIEFF. [*Still following her*] Do let them have something to eat, Zuzu; they are young and must be hungry by now, poor things—Zuzu!

ZINAIDA. The Count did not finish his tea, and all that sugar has been wasted. [*Goes out through the door on the left.*

LEBEDIEFF. Bah! [*Goes out into the garden.*

Enter IVANOFF *and* SASHA *through the door on the right.*

IVANOFF. This is how it is, Sasha: I used to work hard and think hard, and never tire; now, I neither do anything nor think anything, and I am weary, body and soul. I feel I am terribly to blame, my conscience leaves me no peace day or night, and yet I can't see clearly exactly what my mistakes are. And now comes my wife's illness, our poverty, this eternal backbiting, gossiping, chattering, that foolish Borkin— My home has become unendurable to me, and to live there is worse than torture. Frankly, Sasha, the presence of my wife, who loves me, has become unbearable. You are an old friend, little Sasha, you will not be angry with me for

speaking so openly. I came to you to be cheered, but I am bored here too, something urges me home again. Forgive me, I shall slip away at once.

SASHA. I can understand your trouble, Nicholas. You are unhappy because you are lonely. You need some one at your side whom you can love, someone who understands you.

IVANOFF. What an idea, Sasha! Fancy a crusty old badger like myself starting a love affair! Heaven preserve me from such misfortune! No, my little sage, this is not a case for romance. The fact is, I can endure all I have to suffer: sadness, sickness of mind, ruin, the loss of my wife, and my lonely, broken old age, but I cannot, I will not, endure the contempt I have for myself! I am nearly killed by shame when I think that a strong, healthy man like myself has become—oh, heaven only knows what—by no means a Manfred or a Hamlet! There are some unfortunates who feel flattered when people call them Hamlets and cynics, but to me it is an insult. It wounds my pride and I am tortured by shame and suffer agony.

SASHA. [*Laughing through her tears*] Nicholas, let us run away to America together!

IVANOFF. I haven't the energy to take such a step as that, and besides, in America you— [*They go toward the door into the garden*] As a matter of fact, Sasha, this is not a good place for you to live. When I look about at the men who surround you I am terrified for you; whom is there you could marry? Your only chance will be if some passing lieutenant or student steals your heart and carries you away.

Enter ZINAIDA *through the door on the right with a jar of jam.*

IVANOFF. Excuse me, Sasha, I shall join you in a minute.

SASHA *goes out into the garden.*

IVANOFF. [*To* ZINAIDA] Zinaida, may I ask you a favour?

ZINAIDA. What is it?

IVANOFF. The fact is, you know, that the interest on my note is due day after to-morrow, but I should be more than obliged to you if you will let me postpone the payment of it, or would let me add the interest to the capital. I simply cannot pay it now; I haven't the money.

ZINAIDA. Oh, Ivanoff, how could I do such a thing? Would it be business-like? No, no, don't ask it, don't torment an unfortunate old woman.

IVANOFF. I beg your pardon. [*He goes out into the garden.*

ZINAIDA. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What a fright he gave me! I am trembling all over. [*Goes out through the door on the right.*

Enter KOSICH *through the door on the left. He walks across the stage.*

KOSICH. I had the ace, king, queen, and eight of diamonds, the ace of spades, and one, just one little heart, and she——may the foul fiend fly away with her,—she couldn't make a little slam!

Goes out through the door on the right. Enter from the garden AVDOTIA *and* FIRST GUEST.

AVDOTIA. Oh, how I should like to get my claws into her, the miserable old miser! How I should like it! Does she think it a joke to leave us sitting here since five o'clock without even offering us a crust to eat? What a house! What management!

FIRST GUEST. I am so bored that I feel like beating my head against the wall. Lord, what a queer lot of people! I shall soon be howling like a wolf and snapping at them from hunger and weariness.

AVDOTIA. How I should like to get my claws into her, the old sinner!

FIRST GUEST. I shall get a drink, old lady, and then home I go! I won't have anything to do with these belles of yours.

How the devil can a man think of love who hasn't had a drop to drink since dinner?

AVDOTIA. Come on, we will go and find something.

FIRST GUEST. Sh! Softly! I think the brandy is in the sideboard in the dining-room. We will find George! Sh!

They go out through the door on the left. Enter ANNA *and* LVOFF *through the door on the right.*

ANNA. No, they will be glad to see us. Is no one here? Then they must be in the garden.

LVOFF. I should like to know why you have brought me into this den of wolves. This is no place for you and me; honourable people should not be subjected to such influences as these.

ANNA. Listen to me, Mr. Honourable Man. When you are escorting a lady it is very bad manners to talk to her the whole way about nothing but your own honesty. Such behaviour may be perfectly honest, but it is also tedious, to say the least. Never tell a woman how good you are; let her find it out herself. My Nicholas used only to sing and tell stories when he was young as you are, and yet every woman knew at once what kind of a man he was.

LVOFF. Don't talk to me of your Nicholas; I know all about him!

ANNA. You are a very worthy man, but you don't know anything at all. Come into the garden. He never said: "I am an honest man; these surroundings are too narrow for me." He never spoke of wolves' dens, called people bears or vultures. He left the animal kingdom alone, and the most I have ever heard him say when he was excited was: "Oh, how unjust I have been to-day!" or "Annie, I am sorry for that man." That's what he would say, but you——

ANNA *and* LVOFF *go out. Enter* AVDOTIA *and* FIRST GUEST *through the door on the left.*

FIRST GUEST. There isn't any in the dining-room, so it must be somewhere in the pantry. We must find George. Come this way, through the sitting-room.

AVDOTIA. Oh, how I should like to get my claws into her!

They go out through the door on the right. MARTHA *and* BORKIN *run in laughing from the garden.* SHABELSKI *comes mincing behind them, laughing and rubbing his hands.*

MARTHA. Oh, I am so bored! [*Laughs loudly*] This is deadly! Every one looks as if he had swallowed a poker. I am frozen to the marrow by this icy dullness. [*She skips about*] Let us do something!

BORKIN *catches her by the waist and kisses her cheek.*

SHABELSKI. [*Laughing and snapping his fingers*] Well, I'll be hanged! [*Cackling*] Really, you know!

MARTHA. Let go! Let go, you wretch! What will the Count think? Stop, I say!

BORKIN. Angel! Jewel! Lend me twenty-three hundred roubles.

MARTHA. Most certainly not! Do what you please, but I'll thank you to leave my money alone. No, no, no! Oh, let go, will you?

SHABELSKI. [*Mincing around them*] The little birdie has its charms! [*Seriously*] Come, that will do!

BORKIN. Let us come to the point, and consider my proposition frankly as a business arrangement. Answer me honestly, without tricks and equivocations, do you agree to do it or not? Listen to me; [*Pointing to Shabelski*] he needs money to the amount of at least three thousand a year; you need a husband. Do you want to be a Countess?

SHABELSKI. [*Laughing loudly*] Oh, the cynic!

BORKIN. Do you want to be a Countess or not?

MARTHA. [*Excitedly*] Wait a minute; really, Misha, these

things aren't done in a second like this. If the Count wants to marry me, let him ask me himself, and—and— I don't see, I don't understand—all this is so sudden——

BORKIN. Come, don't let us beat about the bush; this is a business arrangement. Do you agree or not?

SHABELSKI. [*Chuckling and rubbing his hands*] Supposing I do marry her, eh? Hang it, why shouldn't I play her this shabby trick? What do you say, little puss? [*He kisses her cheek*] Dearest chick-a-biddy!

MARTHA. Stop! Stop! I hardly know what I am doing. Go away! No—don't go!

BORKIN. Answer at once: is it yes or no? We can't stand here forever.

MARTHA. Look here, Count, come and visit me for three or four days. It is gay at my house, not like this place. Come to-morrow. [*To* BORKIN] Or is this all a joke?

BORKIN. [*Angrily*] How could I joke on such a serious subject?

MARTHA. Wait! Stop! Oh, I feel faint! A Countess! I am fainting, I am falling!

BORKIN *and* SHABELSKI *laugh and catch her by the arms. They kiss her cheeks and lead her out through the door on the right.* IVANOFF *and* SASHA *run in from the garden.*

IVANOFF. [*Desperately clutching his head*] It can't be true! Don't Sasha, don't! Oh, I implore you not to!

SASHA. I love you madly. Without you my life can have no meaning, no happiness, no hope.

IVANOFF. Why, why do you say that? What do you mean? Little Sasha, don't say it!

SASHA. You were the only joy of my childhood; I loved you body and soul then, as myself, but now— Oh, I love you, Nicholas! Take me with you to the ends of the earth, wher-

ever you wish; but for heaven's sake let us go at once, or I shall die.

IVANOFF. [*Shaking with wild laughter*] What is this? Is it the beginning for me of a new life? Is it, Sasha? Oh, my happiness, my joy! [*He draws her to him*] My freshness, my youth!

Enter ANNA *from the garden. She sees her husband and* SASHA, *and stops as if petrified.*

IVANOFF. Oh, then I shall live once more? And work?

IVANOFF *and* SASHA *kiss each other. After the kiss they look around and see* ANNA.

IVANOFF. [*With horror*] Sarah!

The curtain falls.

ACT III

Library in IVANOFF'S *house. On the walls hang maps, pictures, guns, pistols, sickles, whips, etc. A writing-table. On it lie in disorder knick-knacks, papers, books, parcels, and several revolvers. Near the papers stand a lamp, a decanter of vodka, and a plate of salted herrings. Pieces of bread and cucumber are scattered about.* SHABELSKI *and* LEBEDIEFF *are sitting at the writing-table.* BORKIN *is sitting astride a chair in the middle of the room.* PETER *is standing near the door.*

LEBEDIEFF. The policy of France is clear and definite; the French know what they want: it is to skin those German sausages, but the Germans must sing another song; France is not the only thorn in their flesh.

SHABELSKI. Nonsense! In my opinion the Germans are cowards and the French are the same. They are showing their teeth at one another, but you can take my word for it, they will not do more than that; they'll never fight!

BORKIN. Why should they fight? Why all these congresses, this arming and expense? Do you know what I would do in their place? I would catch all the dogs in the kingdom and inoculate them with Pasteur's serum, then I would let them loose in the enemy's country, and the enemies would all go mad in a month.

LEBEDIEFF. [*Laughing*] His head is small, but the great ideas are hidden away in it like fish in the sea!

SHABELSKI. Oh, he is a genius.

LEBEDIEFF. Heaven help you, Misha, you are a funny

chap. [*He stops laughing*] But how is this, gentlemen? Here we are talking Germany, Germany, and never a word about vodka! Repetatur! [*He fills three glasses*] Here's to you all! [*He drinks and eats*] This herring is the best of all relishes.

SHABELSKI. No, no, these cucumbers are better; every wise man since the creation of the world has been trying to invent something better than a salted cucumber, and not one has succeeded. [*To* PETER] Peter, go and fetch some more cucumbers. And Peter, tell the cook to make four little onion pasties, and see that we get them hot.

PETER *goes out.*

LEBEDIEFF. Caviar is good with vodka, but it must be prepared with skill. Take a quarter of a pound of pressed caviar, two little onions, and a little olive oil; mix them together and put a slice of lemon on top—so! Lord! The very perfume would drive you crazy!

BORKIN. Roast snipe are good too, but they must be cooked right. They should first be cleaned, then sprinkled with bread crumbs, and roasted until they will crackle between the teeth—crunch, crunch!

SHABELSKI. We had something good at Martha's yesterday: white mushrooms.

LEBEDIEFF. You don't say so!

SHABELSKI. And they were especially well prepared, too, with onions and bay-leaves and spices, you know. When the dish was opened, the odour that floated out was simply intoxicating!

LEBEDIEFF. What do you say, gentlemen? Repetatur! [*He drinks*] Good health to you! [*He looks at his watch*] I must be going. I can't wait for Nicholas. So you say Martha gave you mushrooms? We haven't seen one at home. Will you please tell me, Count, what plot you are hatching that takes you to Martha's so often?

SHABELSKI. [*Nodding at* BORKIN] He wants me to marry her.

LEBEDIEFF. Wants you to marry her! How old are you?

SHABELSKI. Sixty-two.

LEBEDIEFF. Really, you are just the age to marry, aren't you? And Martha is just suited to you!

BORKIN. This is not a question of Martha, but of Martha's money.

LEBEDIEFF. Aren't you moonstruck, and don't you want the moon too?

SHABELSKI. Borkin here is quite in earnest about it; the clever fellow is sure I shall obey orders, and marry Martha.

BORKIN. What do you mean? Aren't you sure yourself?

SHABELSKI. Are you mad? I never was sure of anything. Bah!

BORKIN. Many thanks! I am much obliged to you for the information. So you are trying to fool me, are you? First you say you will marry Martha and then you say you won't; the devil only knows which you really mean, but I have given her my word of honour that you will. So you have changed your mind, have you?

SHABELSKI. He is actually in earnest; what an extraordinary man!

BORKIN. [*Losing his temper*] If that is how you feel about it, why have you turned an honest woman's head? Her heart is set on your title, and she can neither eat nor sleep for thinking of it. How can you make a jest of such things? Do you think such behaviour is honourable?

SHABELSKI. [*Snapping his fingers*] Well, why not play her this shabby trick, after all? Eh? Just out of spite? I shall certainly do it, upon my word I shall! What a joke it will be!

Enter LVOFF.

LEBEDIEFF. We bow before you, Æsculapius! [*He shakes hands with* LVOFF *and sings*]

"Doctor, doctor, save, oh, save me,
I am scared to death of dying!"

LVOFF. Hasn't Ivanoff come home yet?

LEBEDIEFF. Not yet. I have been waiting for him myself for over an hour.

LVOFF *walks impatiently up and down.*

LEBEDIEFF. How is Anna to-day?

LVOFF. Very ill.

LEBEDIEFF. [*Sighing*] May one go and pay one's respects to her?

LVOFF. No, please don't. She is asleep, I believe.

LEBEDIEFF. She is a lovely, charming woman. [*Sighing*] The day she fainted at our house, on Sasha's birthday, I saw that she had not much longer to live, poor thing. Let me see, why did she faint? When I ran up, she was lying on the floor, ashy white, with Nicholas on his knees beside her, and Sasha was standing by them in tears. Sasha and I went about almost crazy for a week after that.

SHABELSKI. [*To* LVOFF] Tell me, most honoured disciple of science, what scholar discovered that the frequent visits of a young doctor were beneficial to ladies suffering from affections of the chest? It is a remarkable discovery, remarkable! Would you call such treatment Allopathic or Homeopathic?

LVOFF *tries to answer, but makes an impatient gesture instead, and walks out of the room.*

SHABELSKI. What a withering look he gave me!

LEBEDIEFF. Some fiend must prompt you to say such things! Why did you offend him?

SHABELSKI. [*Angrily*] Why does he tell such lies? Con-

sumption! No hope! She is dying! It is nonsense, I can't abide him!

LEBEDIEFF. What makes you think he is lying?

SHABELSKI. [*Gets up and walks up and down*] I can't bear to think that a living person could die like that, suddenly, without any reason at all. Don't let us talk about it!

KOSICH *runs in panting.*

KOSICH. Is Ivanoff at home? How do you do? [*He shakes hands quickly all round*] Is he at home?

BORKIN. No, he isn't.

KOSICH. [*Sits down and jumps up again*] In that case I must say good-bye; I must be going. Business, you know. I am absolutely exhausted; run off my feet!

LEBEDIEFF. Where did you blow in from?

KOSICH. From Barabanoff's. He and I have been playing cards all night; we have only just stopped. I have been absolutely fleeced; that Barabanoff is a demon at cards. [*In a tearful voice*] Just listen to this: I had a heart and he [*He turns to* BORKIN, *who jumps away from him*] led a diamond, and I led a heart, and he led another diamond. Well, he didn't take the trick. [*To* LEBEDIEFF] We were playing three in clubs. I had the ace and queen, and the ace and ten of spades——

LEBEDIEFF. [*Stopping up his ears*] Spare me, for heaven's sake, spare me!

KOSICH. [*To* SHABELSKI] Do you understand? I had the ace and queen of clubs, the ace and ten of spades——

SHABELSKI. [*Pushes him away*] Go away, I don't want to listen to you!

KOSICH. When suddenly misfortune overtook me. My ace of spades took the first trick——

SHABELSKI. [*Snatching up a revolver*] Leave the room, or I shall shoot!

KOSICH. [*Waving his hands*] What does this mean? Is this the Australian bush, where no one has any interests in common? Where there is no public spirit, and each man lives for himself alone? However, I must be off. My time is precious. [*He shakes hands with* LEBEDIEFF] Pass!

General laughter. KOSICH *goes out. In the doorway he runs into* AVDOTIA.

AVDOTIA. [*Shrieks*] Bad luck to you, you nearly knocked me down.

ALL. Oh, she is always everywhere at once!

AVDOTIA. So this is where you all are? I have been looking for you all over the house. Good-day to you, boys!

[*She shakes hands with everybody.*

LEBEDIEFF. What brings you here?

AVDOTIA. Business, my son. [*To* SHABELSKI] Business connected with your highness. She commanded me to bow. [*She bows*] And to inquire after your health. She told me to say, the little birdie, that if you did not come to see her this evening she would cry her eyes out. Take him aside, she said, and whisper in his ear. But why should I make a secret of her message? We are not stealing chickens, but arranging an affair of lawful love by mutual consent of both parties. And now, although I never drink, I shall take a drop under these circumstances.

LEBEDIEFF. So shall I. [*He pours out the vodka*] You must be immortal, you old magpie! You were an old woman when I first knew you, thirty years ago.

AVDOTIA. I have lost count of the years. I have buried three husbands, and would have married a fourth if any one had wanted a woman without a dowry. I have had eight children. [*She takes up the glass*] Well, we have begun a good work, may it come to a good end! They will live happily ever

after, and we shall enjoy their happiness. Love and good luck to them both! [*She drinks*] This is strong vodka!

SHABELSKI. [*Laughing loudly, to* LEBEDIEFF] The funny thing is, they actually think I am in earnest. How strange! [*He gets up*] And yet, Paul, why shouldn't I play her this shabby trick? Just out of spite? To give the devil something to do, eh, Paul?

LEBEDIEFF. You are talking nonsense, Count. You and I must fix our thoughts on dying now; we have left Martha's money far behind us; our day is over.

SHABELSKI. No, I shall certainly marry her; upon my word, I shall!

Enter IVANOFF *and* LVOFF.

LVOFF. Will you please spare me five minutes of your time?

LEBEDIEFF. Hallo, Nicholas! [*He goes to meet* IVANOFF] How are you, old friend? I have been waiting an hour for you.

AVDOTIA. [*Bows*] How do you do, my son?

IVANOFF. [*Bitterly*] So you have turned my library into a bar-room again, have you? And yet I have begged you all a thousand times not to do so! [*He goes up to the table*] There, you see, you have spilt vodka all over my papers and scattered crumbs and cucumbers everywhere! It is disgusting!

LEBEDIEFF. I beg your pardon, Nicholas. Please forgive me. I have something very important to speak to you about.

BORKIN. So have I.

LVOFF. May I have a word with you?

IVANOFF. [*Pointing to* LEBEDIEFF] He wants to speak to me; wait a minute. [*To* LEBEDIEFF] Well, what is it?

LEBEDIEFF. [*To the others*] Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I want to speak to him in private.

SHABELSKI *goes out, followed by* AVDOTIA, BORKIN, *and* LVOFF.

IVANOFF. Paul, you may drink yourself as much as you choose, it is your weakness, but I must ask you not to make my uncle tipsy. He never used to drink at all; it is bad for him.

LEBEDIEFF. [*Startled*] My dear boy, I didn't know that! I wasn't thinking of him at all.

IVANOFF. If this old baby should die on my hands the blame would be mine, not yours. Now, what do you want?

[*A pause.*

LEBEDIEFF. The fact is, Nicholas—I really don't know how I can put it to make it seem less brutal—Nicholas, I am ashamed of myself, I am blushing, my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. My dear boy, put yourself in my place; remember that I am not a free man, I am as putty in the hands of my wife, a slave—forgive me!

IVANOFF. What does this mean?

LEBEDIEFF. My wife has sent me to you; do me a favour, be a friend to me, pay her the interest on the money you owe her. Believe me, she has been tormenting me and going for me tooth and nail. For heaven's sake, free yourself from her clutches!

IVANOFF. You know, Paul, that I have no money now.

LEBEDIEFF. I know, I know, but what can I do? She won't wait. If she should sue you for the money, how could Sasha and I ever look you in the face again?

IVANOFF. I am ready to sink through the floor with shame, Paul, but where, where shall I get the money? Tell me, where? There is nothing I can do but to wait until I sell my wheat in the autumn.

LEBEDIEFF. [*Shrieks*] But she won't wait! [*A pause.*

IVANOFF. Your position is very delicate and unpleasant, but mine is even worse. [*He walks up and down in deep thought*] I am at my wit's end, there is nothing I can sell now.

LEBEDIEFF. You might go to Mulbach and get some money from him; doesn't he owe you sixty thousand roubles?

IVANOFF *makes a despairing gesture.*

LEBEDIEFF. Listen to me, Nicholas, I know you will be angry, but you must forgive an old drunkard like me. This is between friends; remember I am your friend. We were students together, both Liberals; we had the same interests and ideals; we studied together at the University of Moscow. It is our Alma Mater. [*He takes out his purse*] I have a private fund here; not a soul at home knows of its existence. Let me lend it to you. [*He takes out the money and lays it on the table*] Forget your pride; this is between friends! I should take it from you, indeed I should! [*A pause*] There is the money, one hundred thousand roubles. Take it; go to her yourself and say: "Take the money, Zinaida, and may you choke on it." Only, for heaven's sake, don't let her see by your manner that you got it from me, or she would certainly go for me, with her old jam! [*He looks intently into* IVANOFF'S *face*] There, there, no matter. [*He quickly takes up the money and stuffs it back into his pocket*] Don't take it, I was only joking. Forgive me! Are you hurt?

IVANOFF *waves his hand.*

LEBEDIEFF. Yes, the truth is— [*He sighs*] This is a time of sorrow and pain for you. A man, brother, is like a samovar; he cannot always stand coolly on a shelf; hot coals will be dropped into him some day, and then—fizz! The comparison is idiotic, but it is the best I can think of. [*Sighing*] Misfortunes wring the soul, and yet I am not worried about you, brother. Wheat goes through the mill, and comes out as flour, and you will come safely through your troubles; but I am annoyed, Nicholas, and angry with the people around you. The whole countryside is buzzing with gossip; where does it all start? They say you will be soon arrested for your debts,

that you are a bloodthirsty murderer, a monster of cruelty, a robber.

IVANOFF. All that is nothing to me; my head is aching.

LEBEDIEFF. Because you think so much.

IVANOFF. I never think.

LEBEDIEFF. Come, Nicholas, snap your fingers at the whole thing, and drive over to visit us. Sasha loves and understands you. She is a sweet, honest, lovely girl; too good to be the child of her mother and me! Sometimes, when I look at her, I cannot believe that such a treasure could belong to a fat old drunkard like me. Go to her, talk to her, and let her cheer you. She is a good, true-hearted girl.

IVANOFF. Paul, my dear friend, please go, and leave me alone.

LEBEDIEFF. I understand, I understand! [*He glances at his watch*] Yes, I understand. [*He kisses* IVANOFF] Good-bye, I must go to the blessing of the school now. [*He goes as far as the door, then stops*] She is so clever! Sasha and I were talking about gossiping yesterday, and she flashed out this epigram: "Father," she said, "fire-flies shine at night so that the night-birds may make them their prey, and good people are made to be preyed upon by gossips and slanderers." What do you think of that? She is a genius, another George Sand!

IVANOFF. [*Stopping him as he goes out*] Paul, what is the matter with me?

LEBEDIEFF. I have wanted to ask you that myself, but I must confess I was ashamed to. I don't know, old chap. Sometimes I think your troubles have been too heavy for you, and yet I know you are not the kind to give in to them; you would not be overcome by misfortune. It must be something else, Nicholas, but what it may be I can't imagine.

IVANOFF. I can't imagine either what the matter is, unless —and yet no— [*A pause*] Well, do you see, this is what I

wanted to say. I used to have a workman called Simon, you remember him. Once, at threshing-time, to show the girls how strong he was, he loaded himself with two sacks of rye, and broke his back. He died soon after. I think I have broken my back also. First I went to school, then to the university, then came the cares of this estate, all my plans—I did not believe what others did; did not marry as others did; I worked passionately, risked everything; no one else, as you know, threw their money away to right and left as I did. So I heaped the burdens on my back, and it broke. We are all heroes at twenty, ready to attack anything, to do everything, and at thirty are worn-out, useless men. How, oh, how do you account for this weariness? However, I may be quite wrong; go away, Paul, I am boring you.

LEBEDIEFF. I know what is the matter with you, old man: you got out of bed on the wrong side this morning.

IVANOFF. That is stupid, Paul, and stale. Go away!

LEBEDIEFF. It is stupid, certainly. I see that myself now. I am going at once. [LEBEDIEFF *goes out.*

IVANOFF. [*Alone*] I am a worthless, miserable, useless man. Only a man equally miserable and suffering, as Paul is, could love or esteem me now. Good God! How I loathe myself! How bitterly I hate my voice, my hands, my thoughts, these clothes, each step I take! How ridiculous it is, how disgusting! Less than a year ago I was healthy and strong, full of pride and energy and enthusiasm. I worked with these hands here, and my words could move the dullest man to tears. I could weep with sorrow, and grow indignant at the sight of wrong. I could feel the glow of inspiration, and understand the beauty and romance of the silent nights which I used to watch through from evening until dawn, sitting at my work-table, and giving up my soul to dreams. I believed in a bright future then, and looked into it as trustfully as a child looks

into its mother's eyes. And now, oh, it is terrible! I am tired and without hope; I spend my days and nights in idleness; I have no control over my feet or brain. My estate is ruined, my woods are falling under the blows of the axe. [*He weeps*] My neglected land looks up at me as reproachfully as an orphan. I expect nothing, am sorry for nothing; my whole soul trembles at the thought of each new day. And what can I think of my treatment of Sarah? I promised her love and happiness forever; I opened her eyes to the promise of a future such as she had never even dreamed of. She believed me, and though for five years I have seen her sinking under the weight of her sacrifices to me, and losing her strength in her struggles with her conscience, God knows she has never given me one angry look, or uttered one word of reproach. What is the result? That I don't love her! Why? Is it possible? Can it be true? I can't understand. She is suffering; her days are numbered; yet I fly like a contemptible coward from her white face, her sunken chest, her pleading eyes. Oh, I am ashamed, ashamed! [*A pause*] Sasha, a young girl, is sorry for me in my misery. She confesses to me that she loves me; me, almost an old man! Whereupon I lose my head, and exalted as if by music, I yell: "Hurrah for a new life and new happiness!" Next day I believe in this new life and happiness as little as I believe in my happiness at home. What is the matter with me? What is this pit I am wallowing in? What is the cause of this weakness? What does this nervousness come from? If my sick wife wounds my pride, if a servant makes a mistake, if my gun misses fire, I lose my temper and get violent and altogether unlike myself. I can't, I can't understand it; the easiest way out would be a bullet through the head!

Enter LVOFF.

LVOFF. I must have an explanation with you, Ivanoff.

IVANOFF. If we are going to have an explanation every day, doctor, we shall neither of us have the strength to stand it.

LVOFF. Will you be good enough to hear me?

IVANOFF. I have heard all you have told me every day, and have failed to discover yet what you want me to do.

LVOFF. I have always spoken plainly enough, and only an utterly heartless and cruel man could fail to understand me.

IVANOFF. I know that my wife is dying; I know that I have sinned irreparably; I know that you are an honest man. What more can you tell me?

LVOFF. The sight of human cruelty maddens me. The woman is dying and she has a mother and father whom she loves, and longs to see once more before she dies. They know that she is dying and that she loves them still, but with diabolical cruelty, as if to flaunt their religious zeal, they refuse to see her and forgive her. You are the man for whom she has sacrificed her home, her peace of mind, everything. Yet you unblushingly go gadding to the Lebedieffs' every evening, for reasons that are absolutely unmistakable!

IVANOFF. Ah me, it is two weeks since I was there!

LVOFF. [*Not listening to him*] To men like yourself one must speak plainly, and if you don't want to hear what I have to say, you need not listen. I always call a spade a spade; the truth is, you want her to die so that the way may be cleared for your other schemes. Be it so; but can't you wait? If, instead of crushing the life out of your wife by your heartless egoism, you let her die naturally, do you think you would lose Sasha and Sasha's money? Such an absolute Tartuffe as you are could turn the girl's head and get her money a year from now as easily as you can to-day. Why are you in such a hurry? Why do you want your wife to die now, instead of in a month's time, or a year's?

IVANOFF. This is torture! You are a very bad doctor if you think a man can control himself forever. It is all I can do not to answer your insults.

LVOFF. Look here, whom are you trying to deceive? Throw off this disguise!

IVANOFF. You who are so clever, you think that nothing in the world is easier than to understand me, do you? I married Annie for her money, did I? And when her parents wouldn't give it to me, I changed my plans, and am now hustling her out of the world so that I may marry another woman, who will bring me what I want? You think so, do you? Oh, how easy and simple it all is! But you are mistaken, doctor; in each one of us there are too many springs, too many wheels and cogs for us to judge each other by first impressions or by two or three external indications. I cannot understand you, you cannot understand me, and neither of us can understand himself. A man may be a splendid doctor, and at the same time a very bad judge of human nature; you will admit that, unless you are too self-confident.

LVOFF. Do you really think that your character is so mysterious, and that I am too stupid to tell vice from virtue?

IVANOFF. It is clear that we shall never agree, so let me beg you to answer me now without any more preamble: exactly what do you want me to do? [*Angrily*] What are you after, anyway? And with whom have I the honour of speaking? With my lawyer, or with my wife's doctor?

LVOFF. I am a doctor, and as such I demand that you change your conduct toward your wife; it is killing her.

IVANOFF. What shall I do? Tell me! If you understand me so much better than I understand myself, for heaven's sake tell me exactly what to do!

LVOFF. In the first place, don't be so unguarded in your behaviour.

IVANOFF. Heaven help me, do you mean to say that you understand yourself? [*He drinks some water*] Now go away; I am guilty a thousand times over; I shall answer for my sins before God; but nothing has given you the right to torture me daily as you do.

LVOFF. Who has given you the right to insult my sense of honour? You have maddened and poisoned my soul. Before I came to this place I knew that stupid, crazy, deluded people existed, but I never imagined that any one could be so criminal as to turn his mind deliberately in the direction of wickedness. I loved and esteemed humanity then, but since I have known you——

IVANOFF. I have heard all that before.

LVOFF. You have, have you?

He goes out, shrugging his shoulders. He sees SASHA, *who comes in at this moment dressed for riding.*

LVOFF. Now, however, I hope that we can understand one another!

IVANOFF. [*Startled*] Oh, Sasha, is that you?

SASHA. Yes, i is I. How are you? You didn't expect me, did you? Why haven't you been to see us?

IVANOFF. Sasha, this is really imprudent of you! Your coming will have a terrible effect on my wife!

SASHA. She won't see me; I came in by the back entrance; I shall go in a minute. I am so anxious about you. Tell me, are you well? Why haven't you been to see us for such a long time?

IVANOFF. My wife is offended already, and almost dying, and now you come here; Sasha, Sasha, this is thoughtless and unkind of you.

SASHA. How could I help coming? It is two weeks since you were at our house, and you have not answered my letters. I imagined you suffering dreadfully, or ill, or dead. I

have not slept for nights. I am going now, but first tell me that you are well.

IVANOFF. No, I am not well. I am a torment to myself, and every one torments me without end. I can't stand it! And now you come here. How morbid and unnatural it all is, Sasha. I am terribly guilty.

SASHA. What dreadful, pitiful speeches you make! So you are guilty, are you? Tell me, then, what is it you have done?

IVANOFF I don't know; I don't know!

SASHA. That is no answer. Every sinner should know what he is guilty of. Perhaps you have been forging money?

IVANOFF. That is stupid.

SASHA. Or are you guilty because you no longer love your wife? Perhaps you are, but no one is master of his feelings, and you did not mean to stop loving her. Do you feel guilty because she saw me telling you that I love you? No, that cannot be, because you did not want her to see it——

IVANOFF. [*Interrupting her*] And so on, and so on! First you say I love, and then you say I don't; that I am not master of my feelings. All these are commonplace, worn-out sentiments, with which you cannot help me.

SASHA. It is impossible to talk to you. [*She looks at a picture on the wall*] How well those dogs are drawn! Were they done from life?

IVANOFF. Yes, from life. And this whole romance of ours is a tedious old story; a man loses heart and begins to go down in the world; a girl appears, brave and strong of heart, and gives him a hand to help him to rise again. Such situations are pretty, but they are only found in novels and not in real life.

SASHA. No, they are found in real life too.

IVANOFF. Now I see how well you understand real life!

My sufferings seem noble to you; you imagine you have discovered in me a second Hamlet; but my state of mind in all its phases is only fit to furnish food for contempt and derision. My contortions are ridiculous enough to make any one die of laughter, and you want to play the guardian angel; you want to do a noble deed and save me. Oh, how I hate myself to-day! I feel that this tension must soon be relieved in some way. Either I shall break something, or else——

SASHA. That is exactly what you need. Let yourself go! Smash something; break it to pieces; give a yell! You are angry with me, it was foolish of me to come here. Very well, then, get excited about it; storm at me; stamp your feet! Well, aren't you getting angry?

IVANOFF. You ridiculous girl!

SASHA. Splendid! So we are smiling at last! Be kind, do me the favour of smiling once more!

IVANOFF. [*Laughing*] I have noticed that whenever you start reforming me and saving my soul, and teaching me how to be good, your face grows naïve, oh so naïve, and your eyes grow as wide as if you were looking at a comet. Wait a moment; your shoulder is covered with dust. [*He brushes her shoulder*] A naïve man is nothing better than a fool, but you women contrive to be naïve in such a way that in you it seems sweet, and gentle, and proper, and not as silly as it really is. What a strange way you have, though, of ignoring a man as long as he is well and happy, and fastening yourselves to him as soon as he begins to whine and go down-hill! Do you actually think it is worse to be the wife of a strong man than to nurse some whimpering invalid?

SASHA. Yes, it is worse.

IVANOFF. Why do you think so? [*Laughing loudly*] It is a good thing Darwin can't hear what you are saying! He would be furious with you for degrading the human race.

Soon, thanks to your kindness, only invalids and hypochondriacs will be born into the world.

SASHA. There are a great many things a man cannot understand. Any girl would rather love an unfortunate man than a fortunate one, because every girl would like to do something by loving. A man has his work to do, and so for him love is kept in the background. To talk to his wife, to walk with her in the garden, to pass the time pleasantly with her, that is all that love means to a man. But for us, love means life. I love you; that means that I dream only of how I shall cure you of your sadness, how I shall go with you to the ends of the earth. If you are in heaven, I am in heaven; if you are in the pit, I am in the pit. For instance, it would be the greatest happiness for me to write all night for you, or to watch all night that no one should wake you. I remember that three years ago, at threshing time, you came to us all dusty and sunburnt and tired, and asked for a drink. When I brought you a glass of water you were already lying on the sofa and sleeping like a dead man. You slept there for half a day, and all that time I watched by the door that no one should disturb you. How happy I was! The more a girl can do, the greater her love will be; that is, I mean, the more she feels it.

IVANOFF. The love that accomplishes things—hm—that is a fairy tale, a girl's dream; and yet, perhaps it is as it should be. [*He shrugs his shoulders*] How can I tell? [*Gaily*] On my honour, Sasha, I really am quite a respectable man. Judge for yourself: I have always liked to discuss things, but I have never in my life said that our women were corrupt, or that such and such a woman was on the down-hill path. I have always been grateful, and nothing more. No, nothing more. Dear child, how comical you are! And what a ridiculous old stupid I am! I shock all good Christian folk, and go about complaining from morning to night. [*He laughs and*

then leaves her suddenly] But you must go, Sasha; we have forgotten ourselves.

SASHA. Yes, it is time to go. Good-bye. I am afraid that that honest doctor of yours will have told Anna out of a sense of duty that I am here. Take my advice: go at once to your wife and stay with her. Stay, and stay, and stay, and if it should be for a year, you must still stay, or for ten years. It is your duty. You must repent, and ask her forgiveness, and weep. That is what you ought to do, and the great thing is not to forget to do right.

IVANOFF. Again I feel as if I were going crazy; again!

SASHA. Well, heaven help you! You must forget me entirely. In two weeks you must send me a line and I shall be content with that. But I shall write to you——

BORKIN *looks in at the door.*

BORKIN. Ivanoff, may I come in? [*He sees* SASHA] I beg your pardon, I did not see you. Bonjour! [*He bows.*

SASHA. [*Embarrassed*] How do you do?

BORKIN. You are plumper and prettier than ever.

SASHA. [*To* IVANOFF] I must go, Nicholas, I must go.

[*She goes out.*

BORKIN. What a beautiful apparition! I came expecting prose and found poetry instead. [*Sings*]

"You showed yourself to the world as a bird——"

IVANOFF *walks excitedly up and down.*

BORKIN. [*Sits down*] There is something in her, Nicholas, that one doesn't find in other women, isn't there? An elfin strangeness. [*He sighs*] Although she is without doubt the richest girl in the country, her mother is so stingy that no one will have her. After her mother's death Sasha will have the whole fortune, but until then she will only give her ten thousand roubles and an old flat-iron, and to get that she will have to humble herself to the ground. [*He feels in his*

pockets] Will you have a smoke? [*He offers* IVANOFF *his cigarette case*] These are very good.

IVANOFF. [*Comes toward* BORKIN *stifled with rage*] Leave my house this instant, and don't you ever dare to set foot in it again! Go this instant!

BORKIN *gets up and drops his cigarette.*

IVANOFF. Go at once!

BORKIN. Nicholas, what do you mean? Why are you so angry?

IVANOFF. Why! Where did you get those cigarettes? Where? You think perhaps that I don't know where you take the old man every day, and for what purpose?

BORKIN. [*Shrugs his shoulders*] What business is it of yours?

IVANOFF. You blackguard, you! The disgraceful rumours that you have been spreading about me have made me disreputable in the eyes of the whole countryside. You and I have nothing in common, and I ask you to leave my house this instant.

BORKIN. I know that you are saying all this in a moment of irritation, and so I am not angry with you. Insult me as much as you please. [*He picks up his cigarette*] It is time, though, to shake off this melancholy of yours; you're not a schoolboy.

IVANOFF. What did I tell you? [*Shuddering*] Are you making fun of me?

Enter ANNA.

BORKIN. There now, there comes Anna! I shall go.

IVANOFF *stops near the table and stands with his head bowed.*

ANNA. [*After a pause*] What did she come here for? What did she come here for, I ask you?

IVANOFF. Don't ask me, Annie. [*A pause*] I am terribly

guilty. Think of any punishment you want to inflict on me; I can stand anything, but don't, oh, don't ask questions!

ANNA. [*Angrily*] So that is the sort of man you are? Now I understand you, and can see how degraded, how dishonourable you are! Do you remember that you came to me once and lied to me about your love? I believed you, and left my mother, my father, and my faith to follow you. Yes, you lied to me of goodness and honour, of your noble aspirations and I believed every word——

IVANOFF. I have never lied to you, Annie.

ANNA. I have lived with you five years now, and I am tired and ill, but I have always loved you and have never left you for a moment. You have been my idol, and what have you done? All this time you have been deceiving me in the most dastardly way——

IVANOFF. Annie, don't say what isn't so. I have made mistakes, but I have never told a lie in my life. You dare not accuse me of that!

ANNA. It is all clear to me now. You married me because you expected my mother and father to forgive me and give you my money; that is what you expected.

IVANOFF. Good Lord, Annie! If I must suffer like this, I must have the patience to bear it. [*He begins to weep.*

ANNA. Be quiet! When you found that I wasn't bringing you any money, you tried another game. Now I remember and understand everything. [*She begins to cry*] You have never loved me or been faithful to me—never!

IVANOFF. Sarah! That is a lie! Say what you want, but don't insult me with a lie!

ANNA. You dishonest, degraded man! You owe money to Lebedieff, and now, to escape paying your debts, you are trying to turn the head of his daughter and betray her as you have betrayed me. Can you deny it?

IVANOFF. [*Stifled with rage*] For heaven's sake, be quiet! I can't answer for what I may do! I am choking with rage, and I—I might insult you!

ANNA. I am not the only one whom you have basely deceived. You have always blamed Borkin for all your dishonest tricks, but now I know whose they are.

IVANOFF. Sarah, stop at once and go away, or else I shall say something terrible. I long to say a dreadful, cruel thing. [*He shrieks*] Hold your tongue, Jewess!

ANNA. I won't hold my tongue! You have deceived me too long for me to be silent now.

IVANOFF. So you won't be quiet? [*He struggles with himself*] Go, for heaven's sake!

ANNA. Go now, and betray Sasha!

IVANOFF. Know then that you—are dying! The doctor told me that you are dying.

ANNA. [*Sits down and speaks in a low voice*] When did he say so? [*A pause.*

IVANOFF. [*Clutches his head with both hands*] Oh, how guilty I am—how guilty! [*He sobs.*

The curtain falls.

About a year passes between the third and fourth acts.

ACT IV

A sitting-room in LEBEDIEFF'S *house. In the middle of the wall at the back of the room is an arch dividing the sitting-room from the ball-room. To the right and left are doors. Some old bronzes are placed about the room; family portraits are hanging on the walls. Everything is arranged as if for some festivity. On the piano lies a violin; near it stands a violoncello. During the entire act guests, dressed as for a ball, are seen walking about in the ball-room.*

Enter LVOFF, *looking at his watch.*

LVOFF. It is five o'clock. The ceremony must have begun. First the priest will bless them, and then they will be led to the church to be married. Is this how virtue and justice triumph? Not being able to rob Sarah, he has tortured her to death; and now he has found another victim whom he will deceive until he has robbed her, and then he will get rid of her as he got rid of poor Sarah. It is the same old sordid story. [*A pause*] He will live to a fine old age in the seventh heaven of happiness, and will die with a clear conscience. No, Ivanoff, it shall not be! I shall drag your villainy to light! And when I tear off that accursed mask of yours and show you to the world as the blackguard you are, you shall come plunging down headfirst from your seventh heaven, into a pit so deep that the devil himself will not be able to drag you out of it! I am a man of honour; it is my duty to interfere in such cases as yours, and to open the eyes of the blind. I shall fulfil my mission, and to-morrow will find me far away from

this accursed place. [*Thoughtfully*] But what shall I do? To have an explanation with Lebedieff would be a hopeless task. Shall I make a scandal, and challenge Ivanoff to a duel? I am as excited as a child, and have entirely lost the power of planning anything. What shall I do? Shall I fight a duel?

Enter KOSICH. *He goes gaily up to* LVOFF.

KOSICH. I declared a little slam in clubs yesterday, and made a grand slam! Only that man Barabanoff spoilt the whole game for me again. We were playing—well, I said "No trumps" and he said "Pass." "Two in clubs;" he passed again. I made it two in hearts. He said "Three in clubs," and just imagine, can you, what happened? I declared a little slam and he never showed his ace! If he had showed his ace, the villain, I should have declared a grand slam in no trumps!

LVOFF. Excuse me, I don't play cards, and so it is impossible for me to share your enthusiasm. When does the ceremony begin?

KOSICH. At once, I think. They are now bringing Zuzu to herself again. She is bellowing like a bull; she can't bear to see the money go.

LVOFF. And what about the daughter?

KOSICH. No, it is the money. She doesn't like this affair anyway. He is marrying her daughter, and that means he won't pay his debts for a long time. One can't sue one's son-in-law.

MARTHA, *very much dressed up, struts across the stage past* LVOFF *and* KOSICH. *The latter bursts out laughing behind his hand.* MARTHA *looks around.*

MARTHA. Idiot!

KOSICH *digs her in the ribs and laughs loudly.*

MARTHA. Boor!

KOSICH. [*Laughing*] The woman's head has been turned.

Before she fixed her eye on a title she was like any other woman, but there is no coming near her now! [*Angrily*] A boor, indeed!

LVOFF. [*Excitedly*] Listen to me; tell me honestly, what do you think of Ivanoff?

KOSICH. He's no good at all. He plays cards like a lunatic. This is what happened last year during Lent: I, the Count, Borkin and he, sat down to a game of cards. I led a——

LVOFF [*Interrupting him*] Is he a good man?

KOSICH. He? Yes, he's a good one! He and the Count are a pair of trumps. They have keen noses for a good game. First, Ivanoff set his heart on the Jewess, then, when his schemes failed in that quarter, he turned his thoughts toward Zuzu's money-bags. I'll wager you he'll ruin Zuzu in a year. He will ruin Zuzu, and the Count will ruin Martha. They will gather up all the money they can lay hands on, and live happily ever after! But, doctor, why are you so pale to-day? You look like a ghost.

LVOFF. Oh, it's nothing. I drank a little too much yesterday.

Enter LEBEDIEFF *with* SASHA.

LEBEDIEFF. We can have our talk here. [*To* LVOFF *and* KOSICH] Go into the ball-room, you two old fogies, and talk to the girls. Sasha and I want to talk alone here.

KOSICH. [*Snapping his fingers enthusiastically as he goes by* SASHA] What a picture! A queen of trumps!

LEBEDIEFF. Go along, you old cave-dweller; go along.

KOSICH *and* LVOFF *go out.*

LEBEDIEFF. Sit down, Sasha, there— [*He sits down and looks about him*] Listen to me attentively and with proper respect. The fact is, your mother has asked me to say this, do you understand? I am not speaking for myself. Your mother told me to speak to you.

SASHA. Papa, do say it briefly!

LEBEDIEFF. When you are married we mean to give you fifteen thousand roubles. Please don't let us have any discussion about it afterward. Wait, now! Be quiet! That is only the beginning. The best is yet to come. We have allotted you fifteen thousand roubles, but in consideration of the fact that Nicholas owes your mother nine thousand, that sum will have to be deducted from the amount we mean to give you. Very well. Now, beside that——

SASHA. Why do you tell me a'l this?

LEBEDIEFF. Your mother told me to.

SASHA. Leave me in peace! If you had any respect for yourself or me you could not permit yourself to speak to me in this way. I don't want your money! I have not asked for it, and never shall.

LEBEDIEFF. What are you attacking me for? The two rats in Gogol's fable sniffed first and then ran away, but you attack without even sniffing.

SASHA. Leave me in peace, and do not offend my ears with your two-penny calcu'ations.

LEBEDIEFF. [*Losing his temper*] Bah! You all, every one of you, do all you can to make me cut my throat or kill somebody. One of you screeches and fusses all day and counts every penny, and the other is so clever and humane and emancipated that she cannot understand her own father! I offend your ears, do I? Don't you realise that before I came here to offend your ears I was being torn to pieces over there, [*He points to the door*] literally drawn and quartered? So you cannot understand? You two have addled my brain till I am utterly at my wits' end; indeed I am! [*He goes toward the door, and stops*] I don't like this business at all; I don't like any thing about you——

SASHA. What is it, especially, that you don't like?

LEBEDIEFF. Everything, everything!

SASHA. What do you mean by everything?

LEBEDIEFF. Let me explain exactly what I mean. Everything displeases me. As for your marriage, I simply can't abide it. [*He goes up to* SASHA *and speaks caressingly*] Forgive me, little Sasha, this marriage may be a wise one; it may be honest and not misguided, nevertheless, there is something about the whole affair that is not right; no, not right! You are not marrying as other girls do; you are young and fresh and pure as a drop of water, and he is a widower, battered and worn. Heaven help him. I don't understand him at all. [*He kisses his daughter*] Forgive me for saying so, Sasha, but I am sure there is something crooked about this affair; it is making a great deal of talk. It seems people are saying that first Sarah died, and then suddenly Ivanoff wanted to marry you. [*Quickly*] But, no, I am like an old woman; I am gossiping like a magpie. You must not listen to me or any one, only to your own heart.

SASHA. Papa, I feel myself that there is something wrong about my marriage. Something wrong, yes, wrong! Oh, if you only knew how heavy my heart is; this is unbearable! I am frightened and ashamed to confes this; Papa darling, you must help me, for heaven's sake. Oh, can't you tell me what I should do?

LEBEDIEFF. What is the matter, Sasha, what is it?

SASHA. I am so frightened, more frightened than I have ever been before. [*She glances around her*] I cannot understand him now, and I never shall. He has not smiled or looked straight into my eyes once since we have been engaged. He is forever complaining and apologising for something; hinting at some crime he is guilty of, and trembling. I am so tired! There are even moments when I think—I think—that I do not love him as I should, and when he comes to see us, or

talks to me, I get so tired! What does it mean, dear father? I am afraid.

LEBEDIEFF. My darling, my only child, do as your old father advises you; give him up!

SASHA. [*Frightened*] Oh! How can you say that?

LEBEDIEFF. Yes, do it, little Sasha! It will make a scandal, all the tongues in the country will be wagging about it, but it is better to live down a scandal than to ruin one's life.

SASHA. Don't say that, father. Oh, don't. I refuse to listen! I must crush such gloomy thoughts. He is good and unhappy and misunderstood. I shall love him and learn to understand him. I shall set him on his feet again. I shall do my duty. That is settled.

LEBEDIEFF. This is not your duty, but a delusion——

SASHA. We have said enough. I have confessed things to you that I have not dared to admit even to myself. Don't speak about this to any one. Let us forget it.

LEBEDIEFF. I am hopelessly puzzled, and either my mind is going from old age or else you have all grown very clever, but I'll be hanged if I understand this business at all.

Enter SHABELSKI.

SHABELSKI. Confound you all and myself, too! This is maddening!

LEBEDIEFF. What do you want?

SHABELSKI Seriously, I must really do something horrid and rascally, so that not only I but everybody else will be disgusted by it. I certainly shall find something to do, upon my word I shall! I have already told Borkin to announce that I am to be married. [*He laughs*] Everybody is a scoundrel and I must be one too!

LEBEDIEFF. I am tired of you, Matthew. Look here, man, you talk in such a way that, excuse my saying so, you will soon find yourself in a lunatic asylum!

SHABELSKI. Could a lunatic asylum possibly be worse than this house, or any other? Kindly take me there at once. Please do! Everybody is wicked and futile and worthless and stupid; I am an object of disgust to myself, I don't believe a word I say——

LEBEDIEFF. Let me give you a piece of advice, old man; fill your mouth full of tow, light it, and blow at everybody. Or, better still, take your hat and go home. This is a wedding, we all want to enjoy ourselves and you are croaking like a raven. Yes, really.

SHABELSKI *leans on the piano and begins to sob.*

LEBEDIEFF. Good gracious, Matthew, Count! What is it, dear Matthew, old friend? Have I offended you? There, forgive me; I didn't mean to hurt you. Come, drink some water.

SHABELSKI. I don't want any water. [*Raises his head.*

LEBEDIEFF. What are you crying about?

SHABELSKI. Nothing in particular; I was just crying.

LEBEDIEFF. Matthew, tell me the truth, what is it? What has happened?

SHABELSKI. I caught sight of that violoncello, and—and—I remembered the Jewess.

LEBEDIEFF. What an unfortunate moment you have chosen to remember her. Peace be with her! But don't think of her now.

SHABELSKI. We used to play duets together. She was a beautiful, a glorious woman.

SASHA *sobs.*

LEBEDIEFF. What, are you crying too? Stop, Sasha! Dear me, they are both howling now, and I—and I— Do go away; the guests will see you!

SHABELSKI. Paul, when the sun is shining, it is gay even in

a cemetery. One can be cheerful even in old age if it is lighted by hope; but I have nothing to hope for—not a thing!

LEBEDIEFF. Yes, it is rather sad for you. You have no children, no money, no occupation. Well, but what is there to be done about it? [*To* SASHA] What is the matter with you, Sasha?

SHABELSKI. Paul, give me some money. I will repay you in the next world. I would go to Paris and see my wife's grave. I have given away a great deal of money in my life, half my fortune indeed, and I have a right to ask for some now. Besides, I am asking a friend——

LEBEDIEFF. [*Embarrassed*] My dear boy, I haven't a penny. All right though. That is to say, I can't promise anything, but you understand—very well, very well. [*Aside*] This is agony!

Enter MARTHA.

MARTHA. Where is my partner? Count, how dare you leave me alone? You are horrid!

[*She taps* SHABELSKI *on the arm with her fan.*

SHABELSKI. [*Impatiently*] Leave me alone! I can't abide you!

MARTHA. [*Frightened*] How? What?

SHABELSKI. Go away!

MARTHA. [*Sinks into an arm-chair*] Oh! Oh! Oh!

[*She bursts into tears.*

Enter ZINAIDA *crying.*

ZINAIDA. Some one has just arrived; it must be one of the ushers. It is time for the ceremony to begin.

SASHA. [*Imploringly*] Mother!

LEBEDIEFF. Well, now you are all bawling. What a quartette! Come, come, don't let us have any more of this dampness! Matthew! Martha! If you go on like this, I—I—shall cry too. [*Bursts into tears*] Heavens!

ZINAIDA. If you don't need your mother any more, if you are determined not to obey her, I shall have to do as you want, and let you have my blessing.

Enter IVANOFF, *dressed in a long coat, with gloves on.*

LEBEDIEFF. This is the finishing touch! What do you want?

SHABELSKI. Why are you here?

IVANOFF. I beg your pardon, you must allow me to speak to Sasha alone.

LEBEDIEFF. The bridegroom must not come to see the bride before the wedding. It is time for you to go to the church.

IVANOFF. Paul, I implore you.

LEBEDIEFF *shrugs his shoulders.* LEBEDIEFF, ZINAIDA, SHABELSKI, *and* MARTHA *go out.*

SASHA. [*Sternly*] What do you want?

IVANOFF. I am choking with anger; I cannot speak calmly. Listen to me; as I was dressing just now for the wedding, I looked in the glass and saw how grey my temples were. Sasha, this must not be! Let us end this senseless comedy before it is too late. You are young and pure; you have all your life before you, but I——

SASHA. The same old story; I have heard it a thousand times and I am tired of it. Go quickly to the church and don't keep everybody waiting!

IVANOFF. I shall go straight home, and you must explain to your family somehow that there is to be no wedding. Explain it as you please. It is time we came to our senses. I have been playing the part of Hamlet and you have been playing the part of a noble and devoted girl. We have kept up the farce long enough.

SASHA. [*Losing her temper*] How can you speak to me like that? I won't have it.

IVANOFF. But I am speaking, and will continue to speak.

SASHA. What do you mean by coming to me like this? Your melancholy has become absolutely ridiculous!

IVANOFF. No, this is not melancholy. It is ridiculous, is it? Yes, I am laughing, and if it were possible for me to laugh at myself a thousand times more bitterly I should do so and set the whole world laughing, too, in derision. A fierce light has suddenly broken over my soul; as I looked into the glass just now, I laughed at myself, and nearly went mad with shame. [*He laughs*] Melancholy indeed! Noble grief! Uncontrollable sorrow! It only remains for me now to begin to write verses! Shall I mope and complain, sadden everybody I meet, confess that my manhood has gone forever, that I have decayed, outlived my purpose, that I have given myself up to cowardice and am bound hand and foot by this loathsome melancholy? Shall I confess all this when the sun is shining so brightly and when even the ants are carrying their little burdens in peaceful self-content? No, thanks. Can I endure the knowledge that one will look upon me as a fraud, while another pities me, a third lends me a helping hand, or, worst of all, a fourth listens reverently to my sighs, looks upon me as a new Mahomet, and expects me to expound a new religion every moment? No, thank God for the pride and conscience he has left me still. On my way here I laughed at myself, and it seemed to me that the flowers and birds were laughing mockingly too.

SASHA. This is not anger, but madness!

IVANOFF. You think so, do you? No, I am not mad. I see things in their right light now, and my mind is as clear as your conscience. We love each other, but we shall never be married. It makes no difference how I rave and grow bitter by myself, but I have no right to drag another down with me. My melancholy robbed my wife of the last year of her life. Since you have been engaged to me you have forgotten how

to laugh and have aged five years. Your father, to whom life was always simple and clear, thanks to me, is now unable to understand anybody. Wherever I go, whether hunting or visiting, it makes no difference, I carry depression, dulness, and discontent along with me. Wait! Don't interrupt me! I am bitter and harsh, I know, but I am stifled with rage. I cannot speak otherwise. I have never lied, and I never used to find fault with my lot, but since I have begun to complain of everything, I find fault with it involuntarily, and against my will. When I murmur at my fate every one who hears me is seized with the same disgust of life and begins to grumble too. And what a strange way I have of looking at things! Exactly as if I were doing the world a favour by living in it. Oh, I am contemptible.

SASHA. Wait a moment. From what you have just said, it is obvious that you are tired of your melancholy mood, and that the time has come for you to begin life afresh. How splendid!

IVANOFF. I don't see anything splendid about it. How can I lead a new life? I am lost forever. It is time we both understood that. A new life indeed!

SASHA. Nicholas, come to your senses. How can you say you are lost? What do you mean by such cynicism? No, I won't listen to you or talk with you. Go to the church!

IVANOFF. I am lost!

SASHA. Don't talk so loud; our guests will hear you!

IVANOFF. If an intelligent, educated, and healthy man begins to complain of his lot and go down-hill, there is nothing for him to do but to go on down until he reaches the bottom —there is no hope for him. Where could my salvation come from? How can I save myself? I cannot drink, because it makes my head ache. I never could write bad poetry. I cannot pray for strength and see anything lofty in the lan-

guor of my soul. Laziness is laziness and weakness weakness. I can find no other names for them. I am lost; I am lost; there is no doubt of that. [*Looking around*] Some one might come in; listen, Sasha, if you love me you must help me. Renounce me this minute; quickly!

SASHA. Oh, Nicholas! If you only knew how you are torturing me; what agony I have to endure for your sake! Good, thoughtful friend, judge for yourself; can I possibly solve such a problem? Each day you put some horrible problem before me, each one more difficult than the last. I wanted to help you with my love, but this is martyrdom!

IVANOFF. And when you are my wife the problems will be harder than ever. Understand this: it is not love that is urging you to take this step, but the obstinacy of an honest nature. You have undertaken to reawaken the man in me, and to save me in the face of every difficulty, and you are flattered by the hope of achieving your object. You are willing to give up now, but you are prevented from doing it by a feeling that is a false one. Understand yourself!

SASHA. What strange, wild reasoning! How can I give you up now? How can I? You have no mother, or sister, or friends. You are ruined; your estate has been destroyed; every one is speaking ill of you——

IVANOFF. It was foolish of me to come here; I should have done as I wanted to——

Enter LEBEDIEFF.

SASHA. [*Running to her father*] Father! He has rushed over here like a madman, and is torturing me! He insists that I should refuse to marry him; he says he doesn't want to drag me down with him. Tell him that I won't accept his generosity. I know what I am doing!

LEBEDIEFF. I can't understand a word of what you are saying. What generosity?

IVANOFF. This marriage is not going to take place.

SASHA. It is going to take place. Papa, tell him that it is going to take place.

LEBEDIEFF. Wait! Wait! What objection have you to the marriage?

IVANOFF. I have explained it all to her, but she refuses to understand me.

LEBEDIEFF. Don't explain it to her, but to me, and explain it so that I may understand. God forgive you, Nicholas, you have brought a great deal of darkness into our lives. I feel as if I were living in a museum; I look about me and don't understand anything I see. This is torture. What on earth can an old man like me do with you? Shall I challenge you to a duel?

IVANOFF. There is no need of a duel. All you need is a head on your shoulders and a knowledge of the Russian language.

SASHA. [*Walks up and down in great excitement*] This is dreadful, dreadful! Absolutely childish.

LEBEDIEFF. Listen to me, Nicholas; from your point of view what you are doing is quite right and proper, according to the rules of psychology, but I think this affair is a scandal and a great misfortune. I am an old man; hear me out for the last time. This is what I want to say to you: calm yourself; look at things simply, as every one else does; this is a simple world. The ceiling is white; your boots are black; sugar is sweet. You love Sasha and she loves you. If you love her, stay with her; if you don't, leave her. We shan't blame you. It is all perfectly simple. You are two healthy, intelligent, moral young people; thank God, you both have food and clothing—what more do you want? What if you have no money? That is no great misfortune—happiness is not bought with wealth. Of course your estate is mort-

gaged, Nicholas, as I know, and you have no money to pay the interest on the debt, but I am Sasha's father. I understand. Her mother can do as she likes—if she won't give any money, why, confound her, then she needn't, that's all! Sasha has just said that she does not want her part of it. As for your principles, Schopenhauer and all that, it is all folly. I have one hundred thousand roubles in the bank. [*Looking around him*] Not a soul in the house knows it; it was my grandmother's money. That shall be for you both. Take it, give Matthew two thousand——

[*The guests begin to collect in the ball-room.*

IVANOFF. It is no use discussing it any more, I must act as my conscience bids me.

SASHA. And I shall act as my conscience bids me—you may say what you please; I refuse to let you go! I am going to call my mother.

LEBEDIEFF. I am utterly puzzled.

IVANOFF. Listen to me, poor old friend. I shall not try to explain myself to you. I shall not tell you whether I am honest or a rascal, healthy or mad; you wouldn't understand me. I was young once; I have been eager and sincere and intelligent. I have loved and hated and believed as no one else has. I have worked and hoped and tilted against windmills with the strength of ten—not sparing my strength, not knowing what life was. I shouldered a load that broke my back. I drank, I worked, I excited myself, my energy knew no bounds. Tell me, could I have done otherwise? There are so few of us and so much to do, so much to do! And see how cruelly fate has revenged herself on me, who fought with her so bravely! I am a broken man. I am old at thirty. I have submitted myself to old age. With a heavy head and a sluggish mind, weary, used up, discouraged, without faith or love or an object in life, I wander like a shadow among

other men, not knowing why I am alive or what it is that I want. Love seems to me to be folly, caresses false. I see no sense in working or playing, and all passionate speeches seem insipid and tiresome. So I carry my sadness with me wherever I go; a cold weariness, a discontent, a horror of life. Yes, I am lost for ever and ever. Before you stands a man who at thirty-five is disillusioned, wearied by fruitless efforts, burning with shame, and mocking at his own weakness. Oh, how my pride rebels against it all! What mad fury chokes me! [*He staggers*] I am staggering—my strength is failing me. Where is Matthew? Let him take me home.

[*Voices from the ball-room*] The best man has arrived!

Enter SHABELSKI.

SHABELSKI. In an old worn-out coat—without gloves! How many scornful glances I get for it! Such silly jokes and vulgar grins! Disgusting people.

Enter BORKIN *quickly. He is carrying a bunch of flowers and is in a dress-coat. He wears a flower in his buttonhole.*

BORKIN. This is dreadful! Where is he? [*To* IVANOFF] They have been waiting for you for a long time in the church, and here you are talking philosophy! What a funny chap you are. Don't you know you must not go to church with the bride, but alone, with me? I shall then come back for her. Is it possible you have not understood that? You certainly are an extraordinary man!

Enter LVOFF.

LVOFF. [*To* IVANOFF] Ah! So you are here? [*Loudly*] Nicholas Ivanoff, I denounce you to the world as a scoundrel!

IVANOFF. [*Coldly*] Many thanks!

BORKIN. [*To* LVOFF] Sir, this is dastardly! I challenge you to a duel!

LVOFF. Monsieur Borkin, I count it a disgrace not only to

fight with you, but even to talk to you! Monsieur Ivanoff, however, can receive satisfaction from me whenever he chooses!

SHABELSKI. Sir, I shall fight you!

SASHA. [*To* LVOFF] Why, oh why, have you insulted him? Gentlemen, I beg you, let him tell me why he has insulted him.

LVOFF. Miss Sasha, I have not insulted him without cause. I came here as a man of honour, to open your eyes, and I beg you to listen to what I have to tell you.

SASHA. What can you possibly have to tell me? That you are a man of honour? The whole world knows it. You had better tell me on your honour whether you understand what you have done or not. You have come in here as a man of honour and have insulted him so terribly that you have nearly killed me. When you used to follow him like a shadow and almost keep him from living, you were convinced that you were doing your duty and that you were acting like a man of honour. When you interfered in his private affairs, maligned him and criticised him; when you sent me and whomever else you could, anonymous letters, you imagined yourself to be an honourable man! And, thinking that that too was honourable, you, a doctor, did not even spare his dying wife or give her a moment's peace from your suspicions. And no matter what violence, what cruel wrong you committed, you still imagined yourself to be an unusually honourable and clear-sighted man.

IVANOFF. [*Laughing*] This is not a wedding, but a parliament! Bravo! Bravo!

SASHA. [*To* LVOFF] Now, think it over! Do you see what sort of a man you are, or not? Oh, the stupid, heartless people! [*Takes* IVANOFF *by the hand*] Come away from here, Nicholas! Come, father, let us go!

IVANOFF. Where shall we go? Wait a moment. I shall soon put an end to the whole thing. My youth is awake in me again; the former Ivanoff is here once more.

[*He takes out a revolver.*

SASHA. [*Shrieking*] I know what he wants to do! Nicholas, for God's sake!

IVANOFF. I have been slipping down-hill long enough. Now, halt! It is time to know what honour is. Out of the way! Thank you, Sasha!

SASHA. [*Shrieking*] Nicholas! For God's sake hold him!

IVANOFF. Let go! [*He rushes aside, and shoots himself.*

The curtain falls.

THE SEA-GULL

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

CHARACTERS

Irina Arkadina, *an actress*
Constantine Treplieff, *her son*
Peter Sorin, *her brother*
Nina Zarietchnaya, *a young girl, the daughter of a rich landowner*
Ilia Shamraeff, *the manager of* Sorin's *estate*
Paulina, *his wife*
Masha, *their daughter*
Boris Trigorin, *an author*
Eugene Dorn, *a doctor*
Simon Medviedenko, *a schoolmaster*
Jacob, *a workman*
A Cook
A Maidservant

The scene is laid on Sorin's *estate. Two years elapse between the third and fourth acts.*

THE SEA-GULL

ACT I

The scene is laid in the park on SORIN'S *estate. A broad avenue of trees leads away from the audience toward a lake which lies lost in the depths of the park. The avenue is obstructed by a rough stage, temporarily erected for the performance of amateur theatricals, and which screens the lake from view. There is a dense growth of bushes to the left and right of the stage. A few chairs and a little table are placed in front of the stage. The sun has just set.* JACOB *and some other workmen are heard hammering and coughing on the stage behind the lowered curtain.*

MASHA *and* MEDVIEDENKO *come in from the left, returning from a walk.*

MEDVIEDENKO. Why do you always wear mourning?

MASHA. I dress in black to match my life. I am unhappy.

MEDVIEDENKO Why should you be unhappy? [*Thinking it over*] I don't understand it. You are healthy, and though your father is not rich, he has a good competency. My life is far harder than yours. I only have twenty-three roubles a month to live on, but I don't wear mourning. [*They sit down.*

MASHA. Happiness does not depend on riches; poor men are often happy.

MEDVIEDENKO. In theory, yes, but not in reality. Take my case, for instance; my mother, my two sisters, my little brother and I must all live somehow on my salary of twenty-

three roubles a month. We have to eat and drink, I take it. You wouldn't have us go without tea and sugar, would you? Or tobacco? Answer me that, if you can.

MASHA. [*Looking in the direction of the stage*] The play will soon begin.

MEDVIEDENKO. Yes, Nina Zarietchnaya is going to act in Treplieff's play. They love one another, and their two souls will unite to-night in the effort to interpret the same idea by different means. There is no ground on which your soul and mine can meet. I love you. Too restless and sad to stay at home, I tramp here every day, six miles and back, to be met only by your indifference. I am poor, my family is large, you can have no inducement to marry a man who cannot even find sufficient food for his own mouth.

MASHA. It is not that. [*She takes snuff*] I am touched by your affection, but I cannot return it, that is all. [*She offers him the snuff-box*] Will you take some?

MEDVIEDENKO. No, thank you. [*A pause.*

MASHA. The air is sultry; a storm is brewing for to-night. You do nothing but moralise or else talk about money. To you, poverty is the greatest misfortune that can befall a man, but I think it is a thousand times easier to go begging in rags than to— You wouldn't understand that, though.

SORIN *leaning on a cane, and* TREPLIEFF *come in.*

SORIN. For some reason, my boy, country life doesn't suit me, and I am sure I shall never get used to it. Last night I went to bed at ten and woke at nine this morning, feeling as if, from oversleep, my brain had stuck to my skull. [*Laughing*] And yet I accidentally dropped off to sleep again after dinner, and feel utterly done up at this moment. It is like a nightmare.

TREPLIEFF. There is no doubt that you should live in town. [*He catches sight of* MASHA *and* MEDVIEDENKO] You shall be

called when the play begins, my friends, but you must not stay here now. Go away, please.

SORIN. Miss Masha, will you kindly ask your father to leave the dog unchained? It howled so last night that my sister was unable to sleep.

MASHA. You must speak to my father yourself. Please excuse me; I can't do so. [*To* MEDVIEDENKO] Come, let us go.

MEDVIEDENKO. You will let us know when the play begins?

MASHA *and* MEDVIEDENKO *go out.*

SORIN. I foresee that that dog is going to howl all night again. It is always this way in the country; I have never been able to live as I like here. I come down for a month's holiday, to rest and all, and am plagued so by their nonsense that I long to escape after the first day. [*Laughing*] I have always been glad to get away from this place, but I have been retired now, and this was the only place I had to come to. Willy-nilly, one must live somewhere.

JACOB. [*To* TREPLIEFF] We are going to take a swim, Mr. Constantine.

TREPLIEFF. Very well, but you must be back in ten minutes.

JACOB. We will, sir.

TREPLIEFF. [*Looking at the stage*] Just like a real theatre! See, there we have the curtain, the foreground, the background, and all. No artificial scenery is needed. The eye travels direct to the lake, and rests on the horizon. The curtain will be raised as the moon rises at half-past eight.

SORIN. Splendid!

TREPLIEFF. Of course the whole effect will be ruined if Nina is late. She should be here by now, but her father and stepmother watch her so closely that it is like stealing her from a prison to get her away from home. [*He straightens*

SORIN's *collar*] Your hair and beard are all on end. Oughtn't you to have them trimmed?

SORIN. [*Smoothing his beard*] They are the tragedy of my existence. Even when I was young I always looked as if I were drunk, and all. Women have never liked me. [*Sitting down*] Why is my sister out of temper?

TREPLIEFF. Why? Because she is jealous and bored. [*Sitting down beside* SORIN] She is not acting this evening, but Nina is, and so she has set herself against me, and against the performance of the play, and against the play itself, which she hates without ever having read it.

SORIN. [*Laughing*] Does she, really?

TREPLIEFF. Yes, she is furious because Nina is going to have a success on this little stage. [*Looking at his watch*] My mother is a psychological curiosity. Without doubt brilliant and talented, capable of sobbing over a novel, of reciting all Nekrasoff's poetry by heart, and of nursing the sick like an angel of heaven, you should see what happens if any one begins praising Duse to her! She alone must be praised and written about, raved over, her marvellous acting in "La Dame aux Camélias" extolled to the skies. As she cannot get all that rubbish in the country, she grows peevish and cross, and thinks we are all against her, and to blame for it all. She is superstitious, too. She dreads burning three candles, and fears the thirteenth day of the month. Then she is stingy. I know for a fact that she has seventy thousand roubles in a bank at Odessa, but she is ready to burst into tears if you ask her to lend you a penny.

SORIN. You have taken it into your head that your mother dislikes your play, and the thought of it has excited you, and all. Keep calm; your mother adores you.

TREPLIEFF. [*Pulling a flower to pieces*] She loves me, loves me not; loves—loves me not; loves—loves me not! [*Laugh-*

ing] You see, she doesn't love me, and why should she? She likes life and love and gay clothes, and I am already twenty-five years old; a sufficient reminder to her that she is no longer young. When I am away she is only thirty-two, in my presence she is forty-three, and she hates me for it. She knows, too, that I despise the modern stage. She adores it, and imagines that she is working on it for the benefit of humanity and her sacred art, but to me the theatre is merely the vehicle of convention and prejudice. When the curtain rises on that little three-walled room, when those mighty geniuses, those high-priests of art, show us people in the act of eating, drinking, loving, walking, and wearing their coats, and attempt to extract a moral from their insipid talk; when playwrights give us under a thousand different guises the same, same, same old stuff, then I must needs run from it, as Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower that was about to crush him by its vulgarity.

SORIN. But we can't do without a theatre.

TREPLIEFF. No, but we must have it under a new form. If we can't do that, let us rather not have it at all. [*Looking at his watch*] I love my mother, I love her devotedly, but I think she leads a stupid life. She always has this man of letters of hers on her mind, and the newspapers are always frightening her to death, and I am tired of it. Plain, human egoism sometimes speaks in my heart, and I regret that my mother is a famous actress. If she were an ordinary woman I think I should be a happier man. What could be more intolerable and foolish than my position, Uncle, when I find myself the only nonentity among a crowd of her guests, all celebrated authors and artists? I feel that they only endure me because I am her son. Personally I am nothing, nobody. I pulled through my third year at college by the skin of my teeth, as they say. I have neither money nor brains, and on my passport you may read that I am simply a citizen of Kiev. So was my father,

but he was a well-known actor. When the celebrities that frequent my mother's drawing-room deign to notice me at all, I know they only look at me to measure my insignificance; I read their thoughts, and suffer from humiliation.

SORIN. Tell me, by the way, what is Trigorin like? I can't understand him, he is always so silent.

TREPLIEFF. Trigorin is clever, simple, well-mannered, and a little, I might say, melancholic in disposition. Though still under forty, he is surfeited with praise. As for his stories, they are—how shall I put it?—pleasing, full of talent, but if you have read Tolstoi or Zola you somehow don't enjoy Trigorin.

SORIN. Do you know, my boy, I like literary men. I once passionately desired two things: to marry, and to become an author. I have succeeded in neither. It must be pleasant to be even an insignificant author.

TREPLIEFF. [*Listening*] I hear footsteps! [*He embraces his uncle*] I cannot live without her; even the sound of her footsteps is music to me. I am madly happy. [*He goes quickly to meet* NINA, *who comes in at that moment*] My enchantress! My girl of dreams!

NINA. [*Excitedly*] It can't be that I am late? No, I am not late.

TREPLIEFF. [*Kissing her hands*] No, no, no!

NINA. I have been in a fever all day, I was so afraid my father would prevent my coming, but he and my stepmother have just gone driving. The sky is clear, the moon is rising. How I hurried to get here! How I urged my horse to go faster and faster! [*Laughing*] I am *so* glad to see you!

[*She shakes hands with* SORIN.

SORIN. Oho! Your eyes look as if you had been crying. You mustn't do that.

NINA. It is nothing, nothing. Do let us hurry. I must go

in half an hour. No, no, for heaven's sake do not urge me to stay. My father doesn't know I am here.

TREPLIEFF. As a matter of fact, it is time to begin now. I must call the audience.

SORIN. Let me call them—and all—I am going this minute. [*He goes toward the right, begins to sing "The Two Grenadiers," then stops.*] I was singing that once when a fellow-lawyer said to me: "You have a powerful voice, sir." Then he thought a moment and added, "But it is a disagreeable one!" [*He goes out laughing.*

NINA. My father and his wife never will let me come here; they call this place Bohemia and are afraid I shall become an actress. But this lake attracts me as it does the gulls. My heart is full of you. [*She glances about her.*

TREPLIEFF. We are alone.

NINA. Isn't that some one over there?

TREPLIEFF. No. [*They kiss one another.*

NINA. What is that tree?

TREPLIEFF. An elm.

NINA. Why does it look so dark?

TREPLIEFF. It is evening; everything looks dark now. Don't go away early, I implore you.

NINA. I must.

TREPLIEFF. What if I were to follow you, Nina? I shall stand in your garden all night with my eyes on your window.

NINA. That would be impossible; the watchman would see you, and Treasure is not used to you yet, and would bark.

TREPLIEFF. I love you.

NINA. Hush!

TREPLIEFF. [*Listening to approaching footsteps*] Who is that? Is it you, Jacob?

JACOB. [*On the stage*] Yes, sir.

TREPLIEFF. To your places then. The moon is rising; the play must commence.

NINA. Yes, sir.

TREPLIEFF. Is the alcohol ready? Is the sulphur ready? There must be fumes of sulphur in the air when the red eyes shine out. [*To* NINA] Go, now, everything is ready. Are you nervous?

NINA. Yes, very. I am not so much afraid of your mother as I am of Trigorin. I am terrified and ashamed to act before him; he is so famous. Is he young?

TREPLIEFF. Yes.

NINA. What beautiful stories he writes!

TREPLIEFF. [*Coldly*] I have never read any of them, so I can't say.

NINA. Your play is very hard to act; there are no living characters in it.

TREPLIEFF. Living characters! Life must be represented not as it is, but as it ought to be; as it appears in dreams.

NINA. There is so little action; it seems more like a recitation. I think love should always come into every play.

NINA *and* TREPLIEFF *go up onto the little stage;* PAULINA *and* DORN *come in.*

PAULINA. It is getting damp. Go back and put on your goloshes.

DORN. I am quite warm.

PAULINA. You never will take care of yourself; you are quite obstinate about it, and yet you are a doctor, and know quite well that damp air is bad for you. You like to see me suffer, that's what it is. You sat out on the terrace all yesterday evening on purpose.

DORN. [*Sings*]

"Oh, tell me not that youth is wasted."

PAULINA. You were so enchanted by the conversation of Madame Arkadina that you did not even notice the cold. Confess that you admire her.

DORN. I am fifty-five years old.

PAULINA. A trifle. That is not old for a man. You have kept your looks magnificently, and women still like you.

DORN. What are you trying to tell me?

PAULINA. You men are all ready to go down on your knees to an actress, all of you.

DORN. [*Sings*]

"Once more I stand before thee."

It is only right that artists should be made much of by society and treated differently from, let us say, merchants. It is a kind of idealism.

PAULINA. When women have loved you and thrown themselves at your head, has that been idealism?

DORN. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] I can't say. There has been a great deal that was admirable in my relations with women. In me they liked, above all, the superior doctor. Ten years ago, you remember, I was the only decent doctor they had in this part of the country—and then, I have always acted like a man of honour.

PAULINA. [*Seizes his hand*] Dearest!

DORN. Be quiet! Here they come.

ARKADINA *comes in on* SORIN'S *arm; also* TRIGORIN, SHAMRAEFF, MEDVIEDENKO, *and* MASHA.

SHAMRAEFF. She acted most beautifully at the Poltava Fair in 1873; she was really magnificent. But tell me, too, where Tchadin the comedian is now? He was inimitable as Rasplueff, better than Sadofski. Where is he now?

ARKADINA. Don't ask me where all those antediluvians are! I know nothing about them. [*She sits down.*

SHAMRAEFF. [*Sighing*] Pashka Tchadin! There are none left like him. The stage is not what it was in his time. There were sturdy oaks growing on it then, where now but stumps remain.

DORN. It is true that we have few dazzling geniuses these days, but, on the other hand, the average of acting is much higher.

SHAMRAEFF. I cannot agree with you; however, that is a matter of taste, *de gustibus.*

Enter TREPLIEFF *from behind the stage.*

ARKADINA. When will the play begin, my dear boy?

TREPLIEFF. In a moment. I must ask you to have patience.

ARKADINA. [*Quoting from Hamlet*] My son,

> "Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
> And there I see such black grained spots
> As will not leave their tinct."

[*A horn is blown behind the stage.*

TREPLIEFF. Attention, ladies and gentlemen! The play is about to begin. [*A pause*] I shall commence. [*He taps the door with a stick, and speaks in a loud voice*] O, ye time-honoured, ancient mists that drive at night across the surface of this lake, blind you our eyes with sleep, and show us in our dreams that which will be in twice ten thousand years!

SORIN. There won't be anything in twice ten thousand years.

TREPLIEFF. Then let them now show us that nothingness.

ARKADINA. Yes, let them—we are asleep.

The curtain rises. A vista opens across the lake. The moon hangs low above the horizon and is reflected in the water. NINA, *dressed in white, is seen seated on a great rock.*

NINA. All men and beasts, lions, eagles, and quails, horned stags, geese, spiders, silent fish that inhabit the waves, star-fish from the sea, and creatures invisible to the eye—in one word, life—all, all life, completing the dreary round imposed upon it, has died out at last. A thousand years have passed since the earth last bore a living creature on her breast, and the unhappy moon now lights her lamp in vain. No longer are the cries of storks heard in the meadows, or the drone of beetles in the groves of limes. All is cold, cold. All is void, void, void. All is terrible, terrible— [*A pause*] The bodies of all living creatures have dropped to dust, and eternal matter has transformed them into stones and water and clouds; but their spirits have flowed together into one, and that great world-soul am I! In me is the spirit of the great Alexander, the spirit of Napoleon, of Cæsar, of Shakespeare, and of the tiniest leech that swims. In me the consciousness of man has joined hands with the instinct of the animal; I understand all, all, all, and each life lives again in me.

[*The will-o-the-wisps flicker out along the lake shore.*]

ARKADINA. [*Whispers*] What decadent rubbish is this?

TREPLIEFF. [*Imploringly*] Mother!

NINA. I am alone. Once in a hundred years my lips are opened, my voice echoes mournfully across the desert earth, and no one hears. And you, poor lights of the marsh, you do not hear me. You are engendered at sunset in the putrid mud, and flit wavering about the lake till dawn, unconscious, unreasoning, unwarmed by the breath of life. Satan, father of eternal matter, trembling lest the spark of life should glow in you, has ordered an unceasing movement of the atoms that compose you, and so you shift and change for ever. I, the spirit of the universe, I alone am immutable and eternal. [*A pause*] Like a captive in a dungeon deep and void, I know not where I am, nor what awaits me. One thing only is not hid-

den from me: in my fierce and obstinate battle with Satan, the source of the forces of matter, I am destined to be victorious in the end. Matter and spirit will then be one at last in glorious harmony, and the reign of freedom will begin on earth. But this can only come to pass by slow degrees, when after countless æons the moon and earth and shining Sirius himself shall fall to dust. Until that hour, oh, horror! horror! horror! [*A pause. Two glowing red points are seen shining across the lake*] Satan, my mighty foe, advances; I see his dread and lurid eyes.

ARKADINA. I smell sulphur. Is that done on purpose?

TREPLIEFF. Yes.

ARKADINA. Oh, I see; that is part of the effect.

TREPLIEFF. Mother!

NINA. He longs for man——

PAULINA. [*To* DORN] You have taken off your hat again! Put it on, you will catch cold.

ARKADINA. The doctor has taken off his hat to Satan, father of eternal matter——

TREPLIEFF. [*Loudly and angrily*] Enough of this! There's an end to the performance. Down with the curtain!

ARKADINA. Why, what are you so angry about?

TREPLIEFF. [*Stamping his foot*] The curtain; down with it! [*The curtain falls*] Excuse me, I forgot that only a chosen few might write plays or act them. I have infringed the monopoly. I—I——

He would like to say more, but waves his hand instead, and goes out to the left.

ARKADINA. What is the matter with him?

SORIN. You should not handle youthful egoism so roughly, sister.

ARKADINA. What did I say to him?

SORIN. You hurt his feelings.

ARKADINA. But he told me himself that this was all in fun, so I treated his play as if it were a comedy.

SORIN. Nevertheless——

ARKADINA. Now it appears that he has produced a masterpiece, if you please! I suppose it was not meant to amuse us at all, but that he arranged the performance and fumigated us with sulphur to demonstrate to us how plays should be written, and what is worth acting. I am tired of him. No one could stand his constant thrusts and sallies. He is a wilful, egotistic boy.

SORIN. He had hoped to give you pleasure.

ARKADINA. Is that so? I notice, though, that he did not choose an ordinary play, but forced his decadent trash on us. I am willing to listen to any raving, so long as it is not meant seriously, but in showing us this, he pretended to be introducing us to a new form of art, and inaugurating a new era. In my opinion, there was nothing new about it, it was simply an exhibition of bad temper.

TRIGORIN. Everybody must write as he feels, and as best he may.

ARKADINA. Let him write as he feels and can, but let him spare me his nonsense.

DORN. Thou art angry, O Jove!

ARKADINA. I am a woman, not Jove. [*She lights a cigarette*] And I am not angry, I am only sorry to see a young man foolishly wasting his time. I did not mean to hurt him.

MEDVIEDENKO. No one has any ground for separating life from matter, as the spirit may well consist of the union of material atoms. [*Excitedly, to* TRIGORIN] Some day you should write a play, and put on the stage the life of a schoolmaster. It is a hard, hard life.

ARKADINA. I agree with you, but do not let us talk about

plays or atoms now. This is such a lovely evening. Listen to the singing, friends, how sweet it sounds.

PAULINA. Yes, they are singing across the water. [*A pause.*

ARKADINA. [*To* TRIGORIN] Sit down beside me here. Ten or fifteen years ago we had music and singing on this lake almost all night. There are six houses on its shores. All was noise and laughter and romance then, such romance! The young star and idol of them all in those days was this man here, [*Nods toward* DORN] Doctor Eugene Dorn. He is fascinating now, but he was irresistible then. But my conscience is beginning to prick me. Why did I hurt my poor boy? I am uneasy about him. [*Loudly*] Constantine! Constantine!

MASHA. Shall I go and find him?

ARKADINA. If you please, my dear.

MASHA. [*Goes off to the left, calling*] Mr. Constantine! Oh, Mr. Constantine!

NINA. [*Comes in from behind the stage*] I see that the play will never be finished, so now I can go home. Good evening.

[*She kisses* ARKADINA *and* PAULINA.

SORIN. Bravo! Bravo!

ARKADINA. Bravo! Bravo! We were quite charmed by your acting. With your looks and such a lovely voice it is a crime for you to hide yourself in the country. You must be very talented. It is your duty to go on the stage, do you hear me?

NINA. It is the dream of my life, which will never come true.

ARKADINA. Who knows? Perhaps it will. But let me present Monsieur Boris Trigorin.

NINA. I am delighted to meet you. [*Embarrassed*] I have read all your books.

ARKADINA. [*Drawing* NINA *down beside her*] Don't be

afraid of him, dear. He is a simple, good-natured soul, even if he is a celebrity. See, he is embarrassed himself.

DORN. Couldn't the curtain be raised now? It is depressing to have it down.

SHAMRAEFF. [*Loudly*] Jacob, my man! Raise the curtain!

NINA. [*To* TRIGORIN] It was a curious play, wasn't it?

TRIGORIN. Very. I couldn't understand it at all, but I watched it with the greatest pleasure because you acted with such sincerity, and the setting was beautiful. [*A pause*] There must be a lot of fish in this lake.

NINA. Yes, there are.

TRIGORIN. I love fishing. I know of nothing pleasanter than to sit on a lake shore in the evening with one's eyes on a floating cork.

NINA. Why, I should think that for one who has tasted the joys of creation, no other pleasure could exist.

ARKADINA. Don't talk like that. He always begins to flounder when people say nice things to him.

SHAMRAEFF. I remember when the famous Silva was singing once in the Opera House at Moscow, how delighted we all were when he took the low C. Well, you can imagine our astonishment when one of the church cantors, who happened to be sitting in the gallery, suddenly boomed out: "Bravo, Silva!" a whole octave lower. Like this: [*In a deep bass voice*] "Bravo, Silva!" The audience was left breathless. [*A pause.*

DORN. An angel of silence is flying over our heads.

NINA. I must go. Good-bye.

ARKADINA. Where to? Where must you go so early? We shan't allow it.

NINA. My father is waiting for me.

ARKADINA. How cruel he is, really. [*They kiss each other*] Then I suppose we can't keep you, but it is very hard indeed to let you go.

NINA. If you only knew how hard it is for me to leave you all.

ARKADINA. Somebody must see you home, my pet.

NINA. [*Startled*] No, no!

SORIN. [*Imploringly*] Don't go!

NINA. I must.

SORIN. Stay just one hour more, and all. Come now, really, you know.

NINA. [*Struggling against her desire to stay; through her tears*] No, no, I can't.

[*She shakes hands with him and quickly goes out.*

ARKADINA. An unlucky girl! They say that her mother left the whole of an immense fortune to her husband, and now the child is penniless because the father has already willed everything away to his second wife. It is pitiful.

DORN. Yes, her papa is a perfect beast, and I don't mind saying so—it is what he deserves.

SORIN. [*Rubbing his chilled hands*] Come, let us go in; the night is damp, and my legs are aching.

ARKADINA. Yes, you act as if they were turned to stone; you can hardly move them. Come, you unfortunate old man.

[*She takes his arm.*

SHAMRAEFF. [*Offering his arm to his wife*] Permit me, madame.

SORIN. I hear that dog howling again. Won't you please have it unchained, Shamraeff?

SHAMRAEFF. No, I really can't, sir. The granary is full of millet, and I am afraid thieves might break in if the dog were not there. [*Walking beside* MEDVIEDENKO] Yes, a whole octave lower: "Bravo, Silva!" and he wasn't a singer either, just a simple church cantor.

MEDVIEDENKO. What salary does the church pay its singers?

[*All go out except* DORN.

DORN. I may have lost my judgment and my wits, but I must confess I liked that play. There was something in it. When the girl spoke of her solitude and the Devil's eyes gleamed across the lake, I felt my hands shaking with excitement. It was so fresh and naïve. But here he comes; let me say something pleasant to him.

TREPLIEFF *comes in.*

TREPLIEFF. All gone already?

DORN. I am here.

TREPLIEFF. Masha has been yelling for me all over the park. An insufferable creature.

DORN. Constantine, your play delighted me. It was strange, of course, and I did not hear the end, but it made a deep impression on me. You have a great deal of talent, and must persevere in your work.

TREPLIEFF *seizes his hand and squeezes it hard, then kisses him impetuously.*

DORN. Tut, tut! how excited you are. Your eyes are full of tears. Listen to me. You chose your subject in the realm of abstract thought, and you did quite right. A work of art should invariably embody some lofty idea. Only that which is seriously meant can ever be beautiful. How pale you are!

TREPLIEFF. So you advise me to persevere?

DORN. Yes, but use your talent to express only deep and eternal truths. I have led a quiet life, as you know, and am a contented man, but if I should ever experience the exaltation that an artist feels during his moments of creation, I think I should spurn this material envelope of my soul and everything connected with it, and should soar away into heights above this earth.

TREPLIEFF. I beg your pardon, but where is Nina?

DORN. And yet another thing: every work of art should

have a definite object in view. You should know why you are writing, for if you follow the road of art without a goal before your eyes, you will lose yourself, and your genius will be your ruin.

TREPLIEFF. [*Impetuously*] Where is Nina?

DORN. She has gone home.

TREPLIEFF. [*In despair*] Gone home? What *shall* I do? I want to see her; I must see her! I shall follow her.

DORN. My dear boy, keep quiet.

TREPLIEFF. I am going. I must go.

MASHA *comes in.*

MASHA. Your mother wants you to come in, Mr. Constantine. She is waiting for you, and is very uneasy.

TREPLIEFF. Tell her I have gone away. And for heaven's sake, all of you, leave me alone! Go away! Don't follow me about!

DORN. Come, come, old chap, don't act like this; it isn't kind at all.

TREPLIEFF. [*Through his tears*] Good-bye, doctor, and thank you.

TREPLIEFF *goes out.*

DORN. [*Sighing*] Ah, youth, youth!

MASHA. It is always "Youth, youth," when there is nothing else to be said.

She takes snuff. DORN *takes the snuff-box out of her hands and flings it into the bushes.*

DORN. Don't do that, it is horrid. [*A pause*] I hear music in the house. I must go in.

MASHA. Wait a moment.

DORN. What do you want?

MASHA. Let me tell you again. I feel like talking. [*She grows more and more excited*] I do not love my father, but my heart turns to you. For some reason, I feel with all my soul

that you are near to me. Help me! Help me, or I shall do something foolish and mock at my life, and ruin it. I am at the end of my strength.

DORN. What is the matter? How can I help you?

MASHA. I am in agony. No one, no one can imagine how I suffer. [*She lays her head on his shoulder and speaks softly*] I love Constantine.

DORN. Oh, how excitable you all are! And how much love there is about this lake of spells! [*Tenderly*] But what can I do for you, my child? What? What?

The curtain falls.

ACT II

The lawn in front of SORIN'S *house. The house stands in the background, on a broad terrace. The lake, brightly reflecting the rays of the sun, lies to the left. There are flowerbeds here and there. It is noon; the day is hot.* ARKADINA, DORN, *and* MASHA *are sitting on a bench on the lawn, in the shade of an old linden. An open book is lying on* DORN'S *knees.*

ARKADINA. [*To* MASHA] Come, get up. [*They both get up*] Stand beside me. You are twenty-two and I am almost twice your age. Tell me, Doctor, which of us is the younger looking?

DORN. You are, of course.

ARKADINA. You see! Now why is it? Because I work; my heart and mind are always busy, whereas you never move off the same spot. You don't live. It is a maxim of mine never to look into the future. I never admit the thought of old age or death, and just accept what comes to me.

MASHA. I feel as if I had been in the world a thousand years, and I trail my life behind me like an endless scarf. Often I have no desire to live at all. Of course that is foolish. One ought to pull oneself together and shake off such nonsense.

DORN. [*Sings softly*]

"Tell her, oh flowers—"

ARKADINA. And then I keep myself as correct-looking as an Englishman. I am always well-groomed, as the saying

is, and carefully dressed, with my hair neatly arranged. Do you think I should ever permit myself to leave the house half-dressed, with untidy hair? Certainly not! I have kept my looks by never letting myself slump as some women do. [*She puts her arms akimbo, and walks up and down on the lawn*] See me, tripping on tiptoe like a fifteen-year-old girl.

DORN. I see. Nevertheless, I shall continue my reading. [*He takes up his book*] Let me see, we had come to the grain-dealer and the rats.

ARKADINA. And the rats. Go on. [*She sits down*] No, give me the book, it is my turn to read. [*She takes the book and looks for the place*] And the rats. Ah, here it is. [*She reads*] "It is as dangerous for society to attract and indulge authors as it is for grain-dealers to raise rats in their granaries. Yet society loves authors. And so, when a woman has found one whom she wishes to make her own, she lays siege to him by indulging and flattering him." That may be so in France, but it certainly is not so in Russia. We do not carry out a programme like that. With us, a woman is usually head over ears in love with an author before she attempts to lay siege to him. You have an example before your eyes, in me and Trigorin.

SORIN *comes in leaning on a cane, with* NINA *beside him.*
MEDVIEDENKO *follows, pushing an arm-chair.*

SORIN. [*In a caressing voice, as if speaking to a child*] So we are happy now, eh? We are enjoying ourselves to-day, are we? Father and stepmother have gone away to Tver, and we are free for three whole days!

NINA. [*Sits down beside* ARKADINA, *and embraces her*] I am so happy. I belong to you now.

SORIN. [*Sits down in his arm-chair*] She looks lovely to-day.

ARKADINA. Yes, she has put on her prettiest dress, and looks sweet. That was nice of you. [*She kisses* NINA] But

we mustn't praise her too much; we shall spoil her. Where is Trigorin?

NINA. He is fishing off the wharf.

ARKADINA. I wonder he isn't bored.

[*She begins to read again.*

NINA. What are you reading?

ARKADINA. "On the Water," by Maupassant. [*She reads a few lines to herself*] But the rest is neither true nor interesting. [*She lays down the book*] I am uneasy about my son. Tell me, what is the matter with him? Why is he so dull and depressed lately? He spends all his days on the lake, and I scarcely ever see him any more.

MASHA. His heart is heavy. [*Timidly, to* NINA] Please recite something from his play.

NINA. [*Shrugging her shoulders*] Shall I? Is it so interesting?

MASHA. [*With suppressed rapture*] When he recites, his eyes shine and his face grows pale. His voice is beautiful and sad, and he has the ways of a poet.

SORIN *begins to snore.*

DORN. Pleasant dreams!

ARKADINA. Peter!

SORIN. Eh?

ARKADINA. Are you asleep?

SORIN. Not a bit of it. [*A pause.*

ARKADINA. You don't do a thing for your health, brother, but you really ought to.

DORN. The idea of doing anything for one's health at sixty-five!

SORIN. One still wants to live at sixty-five.

DORN. [*Crossly*] Ho! Take some camomile tea.

ARKADINA. I think a journey to some watering-place would be good for him.

DORN. Why, yes; he might go as well as not.

ARKADINA. You don't understand.

DORN. There is nothing to understand in this case; it is quite clear. [*A pause.*

MEDVIEDENKO. He ought to give up smoking.

SORIN. What nonsense!

DORN. No, that is not nonsense. Wine and tobacco destroy the individuality. After a cigar or a glass of vodka you are no longer Peter Sorin, but Peter Sorin plus somebody else. Your ego breaks in two: you begin to think of yourself in the third person.

SORIN. It is easy for you to condemn smoking and drinking; you have known what life is, but what about me? I have served in the Department of Justice for twenty-eight years, but I have never lived, I have never had any experiences. You are satiated with life, and that is why you have an inclination for philosophy, but I want to live, and that is why I drink my wine for dinner and smoke cigars, and all.

DORN. One must take life seriously, and to take a cure at sixty-five and regret that one did not have more pleasure in youth is, forgive my saying so, trifling.

MASHA. It must be lunch-time. [*She walks away languidly, with a dragging step*] My foot has gone to sleep.

DORN. She is going to have a couple of drinks before lunch.

SORIN. The poor soul is unhappy.

DORN. That is a trifle, your honour.

SORIN. You judge her like a man who has obtained all he wants in life.

ARKADINA. Oh, what could be duller than this dear tedium of the country? The air is hot and still, nobody does anything but sit and philosophise about life. It is pleasant, my friends, to sit and listen to you here, but I had rather a thou-

sand times sit alone in the room of a hotel learning a rôle by heart.

NINA. [*With enthusiasm*] You are quite right. I understand how you feel.

SORIN. Of course it is pleasanter to live in town. One can sit in one's library with a telephone at one's elbow, no one comes in without being first announced by the footman, the streets are full of cabs, and all——

DORN. [*Sings*]

"Tell her, oh flowers—"

SHAMRAEFF *comes in, followed by* PAULINA.

SHAMRAEFF. Here they are. How do you do? [*He kisses* ARKADINA'S *hand and then* NINA'S] I am delighted to see you looking so well. [*To* ARKADINA] My wife tells me that you mean to go to town with her to-day. Is that so?

ARKADINA. Yes, that is what I had planned to do.

SHAMRAEFF. Hm—that is splendid, but how do you intend to get there, madam? We are hauling rye to-day, and all the men are busy. What horses would you take?

ARKADINA. What horses? How do I know what horses we shall have?

SORIN. Why, we have the carriage horses.

SHAMRAEFF. The carriage horses! And where am I to find the harness for them? This is astonishing! My dear madam, I have the greatest respect for your talents, and would gladly sacrifice ten years of my life for you, but I cannot let you have any horses to-day.

ARKADINA. But if I must go to town? What an extraordinary state of affairs!

SHAMRAEFF. You do not know, madam, what it is to run a farm.

ARKADINA. [*In a burst of anger*] That is an old story! Under these circumstances I shall go back to Moscow this

very day. Order a carriage for me from the village, or I shall go to the station on foot.

SHAMRAEFF. [*Losing his temper*] Under these circumstances I resign my position. You must find yourself another manager. [*He goes out.*

ARKADINA. It is like this every summer: every summer I am insulted here. I shall never set foot here again.

She goes out to the left, in the direction of the wharf. In a few minutes she is seen entering the house, followed by TRIGORIN, *who carries a bucket and fishing-rod.*

SORIN. [*Losing his temper*] What the deuce did he mean by his impudence? I want all the horses brought here at once!

NINA. [*To* PAULINA] How could he refuse anything to Madame Arkadina, the famous actress? Is not every wish, every caprice even, of hers, more important than any farm work? This is incredible.

PAULINA. [*In despair*] What can I do about it? Put yourself in my place and tell me what I can do.

SORIN. [*To* NINA] Let us go and find my sister, and all beg her not to go. [*He looks in the direction in which* SHAMRAEFF *went out*] That man is insufferable; a regular tyrant.

NINA. [*Preventing him from getting up*] Sit still, sit still, and let us wheel you. [*She and* MEDVIEDENKO *push the chair before them*] This is terrible!

SORIN. Yes, yes, it is terrible; but he won't leave. I shall have a talk with him in a moment.

[*They go out. Only* DORN *and* PAULINA *are left.*

DORN. How tiresome people are! Your husband deserves to be thrown out of here neck and crop, but it will all end by this old granny Sorin and his sister asking the man's pardon. See if it doesn't.

PAULINA. He has sent the carriage horses into the fields

too. These misunderstandings occur every day. If you only knew how they excite me! I am ill; see! I am trembling all over! I cannot endure his rough ways. [*Imploringly*] Eugene, my darling, my beloved, take me to you. Our time is short; we are no longer young; let us end deception and concealment, even though it is only at the end of our lives.

[*A pause.*

DORN. I am fifty-five years old. It is too late now for me to change my ways of living.

PAULINA. I know that you refuse me because there are other women who are near to you, and you cannot take everybody. I understand. Excuse me—I see I am only bothering you.

NINA *is seen near the house picking a bunch of flowers.*

DORN. No, it is all right.

PAULINA. I am tortured by jealousy. Of course you are a doctor and cannot escape from women. I understand.

DORN. [*To* NINA, *who comes toward him*] How are things in there?

NINA. Madame Arkadina is crying, and Sorin is having an attack of asthma.

DORN. Let us go and give them both some camomile tea.

NINA. [*Hands him the bunch of flowers*] Here are some flowers for you.

DORN. Thank you. [*He goes into the house.*

PAULINA. [*Following him*] What pretty flowers! [*As they reach the house she says in a low voice*] Give me those flowers! Give them to me!

DORN *hands her the flowers; she tears them to pieces and flings them away. They both go into the house.*

NINA. [*Alone*] How strange to see a famous actress weeping, and for such a trifle! Is it not strange, too, that a famous author should sit fishing all day? He is the idol of the public,

the papers are full of him, his photograph is for sale everywhere, his works have been translated into many foreign languages, and yet he is overjoyed if he catches a couple of minnows. I always thought famous people were distant and proud; I thought they despised the common crowd which exalts riches and birth, and avenged themselves on it by dazzling it with the inextinguishable honour and glory of their fame. But here I see them weeping and playing cards and flying into passions like everybody else.

TREPLIEFF *comes in without a hat on, carrying a gun and a dead sea-gull.*

TREPLIEFF. Are you alone here?

NINA. Yes.

TREPLIEFF *lays the sea-gull at her feet.*

NINA. What do you mean by this?

TREPLIEFF. I was base enough to-day to kill this gull. I lay it at your feet.

NINA. What is happening to you?

[*She picks up the gull and stands looking at it.*

TREPLIEFF. [*After a pause*] So shall I soon end my own life.

NINA. You have changed so that I fail to recognise you.

TREPLIEFF. Yes, I have changed since the time when I ceased to recognise you. You have failed me; your look is cold; you do not like to have me near you.

NINA. You have grown so irritable lately, and you talk so darkly and symbolically that you must forgive me if I fail to follow you. I am too simple to understand you.

TREPLIEFF. All this began when my play failed so dismally. A woman never can forgive failure. I have burnt the manuscript to the last page. Oh, if you could only fathom my unhappiness! Your estrangement is to me terrible, incredible; it is as if I had suddenly waked to find this

lake dried up and sunk into the earth. You say you are too simple to understand me; but, oh, what is there to understand? You disliked my play, you have no faith in my powers, you already think of me as commonplace and worthless, as many are. [*Stamping his foot*] How well I can understand your feelings! And that understanding is to me like a dagger in the brain. May it be accursed, together with my stupidity, which sucks my life-blood like a snake! [*He sees* TRIGORIN, *who approaches reading a book*] There comes real genius, striding along like another Hamlet, and with a book, too. [*Mockingly*] "Words, words, words." You feel the warmth of that sun already, you smile, your eyes melt and glow liquid in its rays. I shall not disturb you.

[*He goes out.*

TRIGORIN. [*Making notes in his book*] Takes snuff and drinks vodka; always wears black dresses; is loved by a schoolteacher——

NINA. How do you do?

TRIGORIN. How are you, Miss Nina? Owing to an unforeseen development of circumstances, it seems that we are leaving here to-day. You and I shall probably never see each other again, and I am sorry for it. I seldom meet a young and pretty girl now; I can hardly remember how it feels to be nineteen, and the young girls in my books are seldom living characters. I should like to change places with you, if but for an hour, to look out at the world through your eyes, and so find out what sort of a little person you are.

NINA. And I should like to change places with you.

TRIGORIN. Why?

NINA. To find out how a famous genius feels. What is it like to be famous? What sensations does it give you?

TRIGORIN. What sensations? I don't believe it gives any. [*Thoughtfully*] Either you exaggerate my fame, or else, if it

exists, all I can say is that one simply doesn't feel fame in any way.

NINA. But when you read about yourself in the papers?

TRIGORIN. If the critics praise me, I am happy; if they condemn me, I am out of sorts for the next two days.

NINA. This is a wonderful world. If you only knew how I envy you! Men are born to different destinies. Some dully drag a weary, useless life behind them, lost in the crowd, unhappy, while to one out of a million, as to you, for instance, comes a bright destiny full of interest and meaning. You are lucky.

TRIGORIN. I, lucky? [*He shrugs his shoulders*] H-m—I hear you talking about fame, and happiness, and bright destinies, and those fine words of yours mean as much to me—forgive my saying so—as sweetmeats do, which I never eat. You are very young, and very kind.

NINA. Your life is beautiful.

TRIGORIN. I see nothing especially lovely about it. [*He looks at his watch*] Excuse me, I must go at once, and begin writing again. I am in a hurry. [*He laughs*] You have stepped on my pet corn, as they say, and I am getting excited, and a little cross. Let us discuss this bright and beautiful life of mine, though. [*After a few moments' thought*] Violent obsessions sometimes lay hold of a man: he may, for instance, think day and night of nothing but the moon. I have such a moon. Day and night I am held in the grip of one besetting thought, to write, write, write! Hardly have I finished one book than something urges me to write another, and then a third, and then a fourth—I write ceaselessly. I am, as it were, on a treadmill. I hurry for ever from one story to another, and can't help myself. Do you see anything bright and beautiful in that? Oh, it is a wild life! Even now, thrilled as I am by talking to you, I do not forget for an

instant that an unfinished story is awaiting me. My eye falls on that cloud there, which has the shape of a grand piano; I instantly make a mental note that I must remember to mention in my story a cloud floating by that looked like a grand piano. I smell heliotrope; I mutter to myself: a sickly smell, the colour worn by widows; I must remember that in writing my next description of a summer evening. I catch an idea in every sentence of yours or of my own, and hasten to lock all these treasures in my literary store-room, thinking that some day they may be useful to me. As soon as I stop working I rush off to the theatre or go fishing, in the hope that I may find oblivion there, but no! Some new subject for a story is sure to come rolling through my brain like an iron cannon-ball. I hear my desk calling, and have to go back to it and begin to write, write, write, once more. And so it goes for everlasting. I cannot escape myself, though I feel that I am consuming my life. To prepare the honey I feed to unknown crowds, I am doomed to brush the bloom from my dearest flowers, to tear them from their stems, and trample the roots that bore them under foot. Am I not a madman? Should I not be treated by those who know me as one mentally diseased? Yet it is always the same, same old story, till I begin to think that all this praise and admiration must be a deception, that I am being hoodwinked because they know I am crazy, and I sometimes tremble lest I should be grabbed from behind and whisked off to a lunatic asylum. The best years of my youth were made one continual agony for me by my writing. A young author, especially if at first he does not make a success, feels clumsy, ill-at-ease, and superfluous in the world. His nerves are all on edge and stretched to the point of breaking; he is irresistibly attracted to literary and artistic people, and hovers about them unknown and unnoticed, fearing to look them bravely in the eye, like a man with

a passion for gambling, whose money is all gone. I did not know my readers, but for some reasom I imagined they were distrustful and unfriendly; I was mortally afraid of the public, and when my first play appeared, it seemed to me as if all the dark eyes in the audience were looking at it with enmity, and all the blue ones with cold indifference. Oh, how terrible it was! What agony!

NINA. But don't your inspiration and the act of creation give you moments of lofty happiness?

TRIGORIN. Yes. Writing is a pleasure to me, and so is reading the proofs, but no sooner does a book leave the press than it becomes odious to me; it is not what I meant it to be; I made a mistake to write it at all; I am provoked and discouraged. Then the public reads it and says: "Yes, it is clever and pretty, but not nearly as good as Tolstoi," or "It is a lovely thing, but not as good as Turgenieff's 'Fathers and Sons,'" and so it will always be. To my dying day I shall hear people say: "Clever and pretty; clever and pretty," and nothing more; and when I am gone, those that knew me will say as they pass my grave: "Here lies Trigorin, a clever writer, but he was not as good as Turgenieff."

NINA. You must excuse me, but I decline to understand what you are talking about. The fact is, you have been spoilt by your success.

TRIGORIN. What success have I had? I have never pleased myself; as a writer, I do not like myself at all. The trouble is that I am made giddy, as it were, by the fumes of my brain, and often hardly know what I am writing. I love this lake, these trees, the blue heaven; nature's voice speaks to me and wakes a feeling of passion in my heart, and I am overcome by an uncontrollable desire to write. But I am not only a painter of landscapes, I am a man of the city besides. I love my country, too, and her people; I feel that, as a writer, it is

my duty to speak of their sorrows, of their future, also of science, of the rights of man, and so forth. So I write on every subject, and the public hounds me on all sides, sometimes in anger, and I race and dodge like a fox with a pack of hounds on his trail. I see life and knowledge flitting away before me. I am left behind them like a peasant who has missed his train at a station, and finally I come back to the conclusion that all I am fit for is to describe landscapes, and that whatever else I attempt rings abominably false.

NINA. You work too hard to realise the importance of your writings. What if you are discontented with yourself? To others you appear a great and splendid man. If I were a writer like you I should devote my whole life to the service of the Russian people, knowing at the same time that their welfare depended on their power to rise to the heights I had attained, and the people should send me before them in a chariot of triumph.

TRIGORIN. In a chariot? Do you think I am Agamemnon? [*They both smile.*

NINA. For the bliss of being a writer or an actress I could endure want, and disillusionment, and the hatred of my friends, and the pangs of my own dissatisfaction with myself; but I should demand in return fame, real, resounding fame! [*She covers her face with her hands*] Whew! My head reels!

THE VOICE OF ARKADINA. [*From inside the house*] Boris! Boris!

TRIGORIN. She is calling me, probably to come and pack, but I don't want to leave this place. [*His eyes rest on the lake*] What a blessing such beauty is!

NINA. Do you see that house there, on the far shore?

TRIGORIN. Yes.

NINA. That was my dead mother's home. I was born

there, and have lived all my life beside this lake. I know every little island in it.

TRIGORIN. This is a beautiful place to live. [*He catches sight of the dead sea-gull*] What is that?

NINA. A gull. Constantine shot it.

TRIGORIN. What a lovely bird! Really, I can't bear to go away. Can't you persuade Irina to stay?

[*He writes something in his note-book.*

NINA. What are you writing?

TRIGORIN. Nothing much, only an idea that occurred to me. [*He puts the book back in his pocket*] An idea for a short story. A young girl grows up on the shores of a lake, as you have. She loves the lake as the gulls do, and is as happy and free as they. But a man sees her who chances to come that way, and he destroys her out of idleness, as this gull here has been destroyed.

[*A pause.* ARKADINA *appears at one of the windows.*

ARKADINA. Boris! Where are you?

TRIGORIN. I am coming this minute.

He goes toward the house, looking back at NINA. ARKADINA *remains at the window.*

TRIGORIN. What do you want?

ARKADINA. We are not going away, after all.

TRIGORIN *goes into the house.* NINA *comes forward and stands lost in thought.*

NINA. It is a dream!

The curtain falls.

ACT III

The dining-room of SORIN'S *house. Doors open out of it to the right and left. A table stands in the centre of the room. Trunks and boxes encumber the floor, and preparations for departure are evident.* TRIGORIN *is sitting at a table eating his breakfast, and* MASHA *is standing beside him.*

MASHA. I am telling you all these things because you write books and they may be useful to you. I tell you honestly, I should not have lived another day if he had wounded himself fatally. Yet I am courageous; I have decided to tear this love of mine out of my heart by the roots.

TRIGORIN. How will you do it?

MASHA. By marrying Medviedenko.

TRIGORIN. The school-teacher?

MASHA. Yes.

TRIGORIN. I don't see the necessity for that.

MASHA. Oh, if you knew what it is to love without hope for years and years, to wait for ever for something that will never come! I shall not marry for love, but marriage will at least be a change, and will bring new cares to deaden the memories of the past. Shall we have another drink?

TRIGORIN. Haven't you had enough?

MASHA. Fiddlesticks! [*She fills a glass*] Don't look at me with that expression on your face. Women drink oftener than you imagine, but most of them do it in secret, and not openly, as I do. They do indeed, and it is always either vodka or brandy. [*They touch glasses*] To your good health! You are so easy to get on with that I am sorry to see you go.

[*They drink.*

TRIGORIN. And I am sorry to leave.

MASHA. You should ask her to stay.

TRIGORIN. She would not do that now. Her son has been behaving outrageously. First he attempted suicide, and now I hear he is going to challenge me to a duel, though what his provocation may be I can't imagine. He is always sulking and sneering and preaching about a new form of art, as if the field of art were not large enough to accommodate both old and new without the necessity of jostling.

MASHA. It is jealousy. However, that is none of my business. [*A pause.* JACOB *walks through the room carrying a trunk;* NINA *comes in and stands by the window*] That schoolteacher of mine is none too clever, but he is very good, poor man, and he loves me dearly, and I am sorry for him. However, let me say good-bye and wish you a pleasant journey. Remember me kindly in your thoughts. [*She shakes hands with him*] Thanks for your goodwill. Send me your books, and be sure to write something in them; nothing formal, but simply this: "To Masha, who, forgetful of her origin, for some unknown reason is living in this world." Good-bye.

[*She goes out.*

NINA. [*Holding out her closed hand to* TRIGORIN] Is it odd or even?

TRIGORIN. Even.

NINA. [*With a sigh*] No, it is odd. I had only one pea in my hand. I wanted to see whether I was to become an actress or not. If only some one would advise me what to do!

TRIGORIN. One cannot give advice in a case like this.

[*A pause.*

NINA. We shall soon part, perhaps never to meet again. I should like you to accept this little medallion as a remembrance of me. I have had your initials engraved on it, and

on this side is the name of one of your books: "Days and Nights."

TRIGORIN. How sweet of you! [*He kisses the medallion*] It is a lovely present.

NINA. Think of me sometimes.

TRIGORIN. I shall never forget you. I shall always remember you as I saw you that bright day—do you recall it?—a week ago, when you wore your light dress, and we talked together, and the white sea-gull lay on the bench beside us.

NINA. [*Lost in thought*] Yes, the sea-gull. [*A pause*] I beg you to let me see you alone for two minutes before you go.

She goes out to the left. At the same moment ARKADINA *comes in from the right, followed by* SORIN *in a long coat, with his orders on his breast, and by* JACOB, *who is busy packing.*

ARKADINA. Stay here at home, you poor old man. How could you pay visits with that rheumatism of yours? [*To* TRIGORIN] Who left the room just now, was it Nina?

TRIGORIN. Yes.

ARKADINA. I beg your pardon; I am afraid we interrupted you. [*She sits down*] I think everything is packed. I am absolutely exhausted.

TRIGORIN. [*Reading the inscription on the medallion*] "Days and Nights, page 121, lines 11 and 12."

JACOB. [*Clearing the table*] Shall I pack your fishing-rods, too, sir?

TRIGORIN. Yes, I shall need them, but you can give my books away.

JACOB. Very well, sir.

TRIGORIN. [*To himself*] Page 121, lines 11 and 12. [*To* ARKADINA] Have we my books here in the house?

ARKADINA. Yes, they are in my brother's library, in the corner cupboard.

TRIGORIN. Page 121— [*He goes out.*

SORIN. You are going away, and I shall be lonely without you.

ARKADINA. What would you do in town?

SORIN. Oh, nothing in particular, but somehow— [*He laughs*] They are soon to lay the corner-stone of the new court-house here. How I should like to leap out of this minnow-pond, if but for an hour or two! I am tired of lying here like an old cigarette stump. I have ordered the carriage for one o'clock. We can go away together.

ARKADINA. [*After a pause*] No, you must stay here. Don't be lonely, and don't catch cold. Keep an eye on my boy. Take good care of him; guide him along the proper paths. [*A pause*] I am going away, and so shall never find out why Constantine shot himself, but I think the chief reason was jealousy, and the sooner I take Trigorin away, the better

SORIN. There were—how shall I explain it to you?—other reasons besides jealousy for his act. Here is a clever young chap living in the depths of the country, without money or position, with no future ahead of him, and with nothing to do. He is ashamed and afraid of being so idle. I am devoted to him and he is fond of me, but nevertheless he feels that he is useless here, that he is little more than a dependent in this house. It is the pride in him.

ARKADINA. He is a misery to me! [*Thoughtfully*] He might possibly enter the army.

SORIN. [*Gives a whistle, and then speaks with hesitation*] It seems to me that the best thing for him would be if you were to let him have a little money. For one thing, he ought to be allowed to dress like a human being. See how he looks! Wearing the same little old coat that he has had for three years, and he doesn't even possess an overcoat! [*Laughing*] And it wouldn't hurt the youngster to sow a few wild

oats; let him go abroad, say, for a time. It wouldn't cost much.

ARKADINA. Yes, but— However, I think I might manage about his clothes, but I couldn't let him go abroad. And no, I don't think I can let him have his clothes even, now. [*Decidedly*] I have no money at present.

SORIN *laughs.*

ARKADINA. I haven't indeed.

SORIN. [*Whistles*] Very well. Forgive me, darling; don't be angry. You are a noble, generous woman!

ARKADINA. [*Weeping*] I really haven't the money.

SORIN. If I had any money of course I should let him have some myself, but I haven't even a penny. The farm manager takes my pension from me and puts it all into the farm or into cattle or bees, and in that way it is always lost for ever. The bees die, the cows die, they never let me have a horse.

ARKADINA. Of course I have some money, but I am an actress and my expenses for dress alone are enough to bankrupt me.

SORIN. You are a dear, and I am very fond of you, indeed I am. But something is the matter with me again. [*He staggers*] I feel giddy. [*He leans against the table*] I feel faint, and all.

ARKADINA. [*Frightened*] Peter! [*She tries to support him*] Peter! dearest! [*She calls*] Help! Help!

TREPLIEFF *and* MEDVIEDENKO *come in;* TREPLIEFF *has a bandage around his head.*

ARKADINA. He is fainting!

SORIN. I am all right. [*He smiles and drinks some water*] It is all over now.

TREPLIEFF. [*To his mother*] Don't be frightened, mother, these attacks are not dangerous; my uncle often has them now. [*To his uncle*] You must go and lie down, Uncle.

SORIN. Yes, I think I shall, for a few minutes. I am going to Moscow all the same, but I shall lie down a bit before I start. [*He goes out leaning on his cane.*

MEDVIEDENKO. [*Giving him his arm*] Do you know this riddle? On four legs in the morning; on two legs at noon; and on three legs in the evening?

SORIN. [*Laughing*] Yes, exactly, and on one's back at night. Thank you, I can walk alone.

MEDVIEDENKO. Dear me, what formality!

[*He and* SORIN *go out.*

ARKADINA. He gave me a dreadful fright.

TREPLIEFF. It is not good for him to live in the country. Mother, if you would only untie your purse-strings for once, and lend him a thousand roubles! He could then spend a whole year in town.

ARKADINA. I have no money. I am an actress and not a banker. [*A pause.*

TREPLIEFF. Please change my bandage for me, mother, you do it so gently.

ARKADINA *goes to the cupboard and takes out a box of bandages and a bottle of iodoform.*

ARKADINA. The doctor is late.

TREPLIEFF. Yes, he promised to be here at nine, and now it is noon already.

ARKADINA. Sit down. [*She takes the bandage off his head*] You look as if you had a turban on. A stranger that was in the kitchen yesterday asked to what nationality you belonged. Your wound is almost healed. [*She kisses his head*] You won't be up to any more of these silly tricks again, will you, when I am gone?

TREPLIEFF. No, mother. I did that in a moment of insane despair, when I had lost all control over myself. It will never happen again. [*He kisses her hand*] Your touch is golden. I

remember when you were still acting at the State Theatre, long ago, when I was still a little chap, there was a fight one day in our court, and a poor washerwoman was almost beaten to death. She was picked up unconscious, and you nursed her till she was well, and bathed her children in the washtubs. Have you forgotten it?

ARKADINA. Yes, entirely. [*She puts on a new bandage.*

TREPLIEFF. Two ballet dancers lived in the same house, and they used to come and drink coffee with you.

ARKADINA. I remember that.

TREPLIEFF. They were very pious. [*A pause*] I love you again, these last few days, as tenderly and trustingly as I did as a child. I have no one left me now but you. Why, why do you let yourself be controlled by that man?

ARKADINA. You don't understand him, Constantine. He has a wonderfully noble personality.

TREPLIEFF. Nevertheless, when he has been told that I wish to challenge him to a duel his nobility does not prevent him from playing the coward. He is about to beat an ignominious retreat.

ARKADINA. What nonsense! I have asked him myself to go.

TREPLIEFF. A noble personality indeed! Here we are almost quarrelling over him, and he is probably in the garden laughing at us at this very moment, or else enlightening Nina's mind and trying to persuade her into thinking him a man of genius.

ARKADINA. You enjoy saying unpleasant things to me. I have the greatest respect for that man, and I must ask you not to speak ill of him in my presence.

TREPLIEFF. I have no respect for him at all. You want me to think him a genius, as you do, but I refuse to lie: his books make me sick.

ARKADINA. You envy him. There is nothing left for people with no talent and mighty pretensions to do but to criticise those who are really gifted. I hope you enjoy the consolation it brings.

TREPLIEFF. [*With irony*] Those who are really gifted, indeed! [*Angrily*] I am cleverer than any of you, if it comes to that! [*He tears the bandage off his head*] You are the slaves of convention, you have seized the upper hand and now lay down as law everything that you do; all else you strangle and trample on. I refuse to accept your point of view, yours and his, I refuse!

ARKADINA. That is the talk of a decadent.

TREPLIEFF. Go back to your beloved stage and act the miserable ditch-water plays you so much admire!

ARKADINA. I never acted in a play like that in my life. You couldn't write even the trashiest music-hall farce, you idle good-for-nothing!

TREPLIEFF. Miser!

ARKADINA. Rag-bag!

TREPLIEFF *sits down and begins to cry softly.*

ARKADINA. [*Walking up and down in great excitement*] Don't cry! You mustn't cry! [*She bursts into tears*] You really mustn't. [*She kisses his forehead, his cheeks, his head*] My darling child, forgive me. Forgive your wicked mother.

TREPLIEFF. [*Embracing her*] Oh, if you could only know what it is to have lost everything under heaven! She does not love me. I see I shall never be able to write. Every hope has deserted me.

ARKADINA. Don't despair. This will all pass. He is going away to-day, and she will love you once more. [*She wipes away his tears*] Stop crying. We have made peace again.

TREPLIEFF. [*Kissing her hand*] Yes, mother.

ARKADINA. [*Tenderly*] Make your peace with him, too. Don't fight with him. You surely won't fight?

TREPLIEFF. I won't, but you must not insist on my seeing him again, mother, I couldn't stand it. [TRIGORIN *comes in*] There he is; I am going. [*He quickly puts the medicines away in the cupboard*] The doctor will attend to my head

TRIGORIN. [*Looking through the pages of a book*] Page 121, lines 11 and 12; here it is. [*He reads*] "If at any time you should have need of my life, come and take it."

TREPLIEFF *picks up the bandage off the floor and goes out.*

ARKADINA. [*Looking at her watch*] The carriage will soon be here.

TRIGORIN. [*To himself*] If at any time you should have need of my life, come and take it.

ARKADINA. I hope your things are all packed.

TRIGORIN. [*Impatiently*] Yes, yes. [*In deep thought*] Why do I hear a note of sadness that wrings my heart in this cry of a pure soul? If at any time you should have need of my life, come and take it. [*To* ARKADINA] Let us stay here one more day!

ARKADINA *shakes her head.*

TRIGORIN. Do let us stay!

ARKADINA. I know, dearest, what keeps you here, but you must control yourself. Be sober; your emotions have intoxicated you a little.

TRIGORIN. You must be sober, too. Be sensible; look upon what has happened as a true friend would. [*Taking her hand*] You are capable of self-sacrifice. Be a friend to me and release me!

ARKADINA. [*In deep excitement*] Are you so much in love?

TRIGORIN. I am irresistibly impelled toward her. It may be that this is just what I need.

ARKADINA. What, the love of a country girl? Oh, how little you know yourself!

TRIGORIN. People sometimes walk in their sleep, and so I feel as if I were asleep, and dreaming of her as I stand here talking to you. My imagination is shaken by the sweetest and most glorious visions. Release me!

ARKADINA. [*Shuddering*] No, no! I am only an ordinary woman; you must not say such things to me. Do not torment me, Boris; you frighten me.

TRIGORIN. You could be an extraordinary woman if you only would. Love alone can bring happiness on earth, love the enchanting, the poetical love of youth, that sweeps away the sorrows of the world. I had no time for it when I was young and struggling with want and laying siege to the literary fortress, but now at last this love has come to me. I see it beckoning; why should I fly?

ARKADINA. [*With anger*] You are mad!

TRIGORIN. Release me.

ARKADINA. You have all conspired together to torture me to-day. [*She weeps.*

TRIGORIN. [*Clutching his head desperately*] She doesn't understand me! She won't understand me!

ARKADINA. Am I then so old and ugly already that you can talk to me like this without any shame about another woman? [*She embraces and kisses him*] Oh, you have lost your senses! My splendid, my glorious friend, my love for you is the last chapter of my life. [*She falls on her knees*] You are my pride, my joy, my light. [*She embraces his knees*] I could never endure it should you desert me, if only for an hour; I should go mad. Oh, my wonder, my marvel, my king!

TRIGORIN. Some one might come in. [*He helps her to rise.*

ARKADINA. Let them come! I am not ashamed of my love. [*She kisses his hands*] My jewel! My despair! You want

to do a foolish thing, but I don't want you to do it. I shan't let you do it! [*She laughs*] You are mine, you are mine! This forehead is mine, these eyes are mine, this silky hair is mine. All your being is mine. You are so clever, so wise, the first of all living writers; you are the only hope of your country. You are so fresh, so simple, so deeply humourous. You can bring out every feature of a man or of a landscape in a single line, and your characters live and breathe. Do you think that these words are but the incense of flattery? Do you think I am not speaking the truth? Come, look into my eyes; look deep; do you find lies there? No, you see that I alone know how to treasure you. I alone tell you the truth. Oh, my very dear, you will go with me? You will? You will not forsake me?

TRIGORIN. I have no will of my own; I never had. I am too indolent, too submissive, too phlegmatic, to have any. Is it possible that women like that? Take me. Take me away with you, but do not let me stir a step from your side.

ARKADINA. [*To herself*] Now he is mine! [*Carelessly, as if nothing unusual had happened*] Of course you must stay here if you really want to. I shall go, and you can follow in a week's time. Yes, really, why should you hurry away?

TRIGORIN. Let us go together.

ARKADINA. As you like. Let us go together then. [*A pause.* TRIGORIN *writes something in his note-book*] What are you writing?

TRIGORIN. A happy expression I heard this morning: "A grove of maiden pines." It may be useful. [*He yawns*] So we are really off again, condemned once more to railway carriages, to stations and restaurants, to Hamburger steaks and endless arguments!

SHAMRAEFF *comes in.*

SHAMRAEFF. I am sorry to have to inform you that your

carriage is at the door. It is time to start, honoured madam, the train leaves at two-five. Would you be kind enough, madam, to remember to inquire for me where Suzdaltzeff the actor is now? Is he still alive, I wonder? Is he well? He and I have had many a jolly time together. He was inimitable in "The Stolen Mail." A tragedian called Izmailoff was in the same company, I remember, who was also quite remarkable. Don't hurry, madam, you still have five minutes. They were both of them conspirators once, in the same melodrama, and one night when in the course of the play they were suddenly discovered, instead of saying "We have been trapped!" Izmailoff cried out: "We have been rapped!" [*He laughs*] Rapped!

While he has been talking JACOB *has been busy with the trunks, and the maid has brought* ARKADINA *her hat, coat, parasol, and gloves. The cook looks hesitatingly through the door on the right, and finally comes into the room.* PAULINA *comes in.* MEDVIEDENKO *comes in.*

PAULINA. [*Presenting* ARKADINA *with a little basket*] Here are some plums for the journey. They are very sweet ones. You may want to nibble something good on the way.

ARKADINA. You are very kind, Paulina.

PAULINA. Good-bye, my dearie. If things have not been quite as you could have wished, please forgive us.

[*She weeps.*

ARKADINA. It has been delightful, delightful. You mustn't cry.

SORIN *comes in through the door on the left, dressed in a long coat with a cape, and carrying his hat and cane. He crosses the room.*

SORIN. Come, sister, it is time to start, unless you want to miss the train. I am going to get into the carriage. [*He goes out.*

MEDVIEDENKO. I shall walk quickly to the station and see you off there. [*He goes out.*

ARKADINA. Good-bye, all! We shall meet again next summer if we live. [*The maid servant*, JACOB, *and the cook kiss her hand*] Don't forget me. [*She gives the cook a rouble*] There is a rouble for all three of you.

THE COOK. Thank you, mistress; a pleasant journey to you.

JACOB. God bless you, mistress.

SHAMRAEFF. Send us a line to cheer us up. [*To* TRIGORIN] Good-bye, sir.

ARKADINA. Where is Constantine? Tell him I am starting. I must say good-bye to him. [*To* JACOB] I gave the cook a rouble for all three of you.

All go out through the door on the right. The stage remains empty. Sounds of farewell are heard. The maid comes running back to fetch the basket of plums which has been forgotten. TRIGORIN *comes back.*

TRIGORIN. I had forgotten my cane. I think I left it on the terrace. [*He goes toward the door on the right and meets* NINA, *who comes in at that moment*] Is that you? We are off.

NINA. I knew we should meet again. [*With emotion*] I have come to an irrevocable decision, the die is cast: I am going on the stage. I am deserting my father and abandoning everything. I am beginning life anew. I am going, as you are, to Moscow. We shall meet there.

TRIGORIN. [*Glancing about him*] Go to the Hotel Slavianski Bazar. Let me know as soon as you get there. I shall be at the Grosholski House in Moltchanofka Street. I must go now. [*A pause.*

NINA. Just one more minute!

TRIGORIN. [*In a low voice*] You are so beautiful! What

bliss to think that I shall see you again so soon! [*She sinks on his breast*] I shall see those glorious eyes again, that wonderful, ineffably tender smile, those gentle features with their expression of angelic purity! My darling! [*A prolonged kiss.*

The curtain falls.

Two years elapse between the third and fourth acts.

ACT IV

A sitting-room in SORIN'S *house, which has been converted into a writing-room for* TREPLIEFF. *To the right and left are doors leading into inner rooms, and in the centre is a glass door opening onto a terrace. Besides the usual furniture of a sitting-room there is a writing-desk in the right-hand corner of the room. There is a Turkish divan near the door on the left, and shelves full of books stand against the walls. Books are lying scattered about on the window-sills and chairs. It is evening. The room is dimly lighted by a shaded lamp on a table. The wind moans in the tree tops and whistles down the chimney. The watchman in the garden is heard sounding his rattle.* MEDVIEDENKO *and* MASHA *come in.*

MASHA. [*Calling* TREPLIEFF] Mr. Constantine, where are you? [*Looking about her*] There is no one here. His old uncle is forever asking for Constantine, and can't live without him for an instant.

MEDVIEDENKO. He dreads being left alone. [*Listening to the wind*] This is a wild night. We have had this storm for two days.

MASHA. [*Turning up the lamp*] The waves on the lake are enormous.

MEDVIEDENKO. It is very dark in the garden. Do you know, I think that old theatre ought to be knocked down. It is still standing there, naked and hideous as a skeleton, with the curtain flapping in the wind. I thought I heard a voice weeping in it as I passed there last night.

MASHA. What an idea! [*A pause.*

MEDVIEDENKO. Come home with me, Masha.

MASHA. [*Shaking her head*] I shall spend the night here.

MEDVIEDENKO. [*Imploringly*] Do come, Masha. The baby must be hungry.

MASHA. Nonsense, Matriona will feed it. [*A pause.*

MEDVIEDENKO. It is a pity to leave him three nights without his mother.

MASHA. You are getting too tiresome. You used sometimes to talk of other things besides home and the baby, home and the baby. That is all I ever hear from you now.

MEDVIEDENKO. Come home, Masha.

MASHA. You can go home if you want to.

MEDVIEDENKO. Your father won't give me a horse.

MASHA. Yes, he will; ask him.

MEDVIEDENKO. I think I shall. Are you coming home to-morrow?

MASHA. Yes, yes, to-morrow.

She takes snuff. TREPLIEFF *and* PAULINA *come in.* TREPLIEFF *is carrying some pillows and a blanket, and* PAULINA *is carrying sheets and pillow cases. They lay them on the divan, and* TREPLIEFF *goes and sits down at his desk.*

MASHA. Who is that for, mother?

PAULINA. Mr. Sorin asked to sleep in Constantine's room to-night.

MASHA. Let me make the bed.

She makes the bed. PAULINA *goes up to the desk and looks at the manuscripts lying on it.* [*A pause.*

MEDVIEDENKO. Well, I am going. Good-bye, Masha. [*He kisses his wife's hand*] Good-bye, mother.

[*He tries to kiss his mother-in-law's hand.*

PAULINA. [*Crossly*] Be off, in God's name!

TREPLIEFF *shakes hands with him in silence, and* MEDVIEDENKO *goes out.*

PAULINA. [*Looking at the manuscripts*] No one ever dreamed, Constantine, that you would one day turn into a real author. The magazines pay you well for your stories. [*She strokes his hair.*] You have grown handsome, too. Dear, kind Constantine, be a little nicer to my Masha.

MASHA. [*Still making the bed*] Leave him alone, mother.

PAULINA. She is a sweet child. [*A pause*] A woman, Constantine, asks only for kind looks. I know that from experience.

TREPLIEFF *gets up from his desk and goes out without a word.*

MASHA. There now! You have vexed him. I told you not to bother him.

PAULINA. I am sorry for you, Masha.

MASHA. Much I need your pity!

PAULINA. My heart aches for you. I see how things are, and understand.

MASHA. You see what doesn't exist. Hopeless love is only found in novels. It is a trifle; all one has to do is to keep a tight rein on oneself, and keep one's head clear. Love must be plucked out the moment it springs up in the heart. My husband has been promised a school in another district, and when we have once left this place I shall forget it all. I shall tear my passion out by the roots.

[*The notes of a melancholy waltz are heard in the distance.*

PAULINA. Constantine is playing. That means he is sad.

MASHA *silently waltzes a few turns to the music.*

MASHA. The great thing, mother, is not to have him con-

tinually in sight. If my Simon could only get his remove I should forget it all in a month or two. It is a trifle.

DORN *and* MEDVIEDENKO *come in through the door on the left, wheeling* SORIN *in an arm-chair.*

MEDVIEDENKO. I have six mouths to feed now, and flour is at seventy kopecks.

DORN. A hard riddle to solve!

MEDVIEDENKO. It is easy for you to make light of it. You are rich enough to scatter money to your chickens, if you wanted to.

DORN. You think I am rich? My friend, after practising for thirty years, during which I could not call my soul my own for one minute of the night or day, I succeeded at last in scraping together one thousand roubles, all of which went, not long ago, in a trip which I took abroad. I haven't a penny.

MASHA. [*To her husband*] So you didn't go home after all?

MEDVIEDENKO. [*Apologetically*] How can I go home when they won't give me a horse?

MASHA. [*Under her breath, with bitter anger*] Would I might never see your face again!

SORIN *in his chair is wheeled to the left-hand side of the room.* PAULINA, MASHA, *and* DORN *sit down beside him.* MEDVIEDENKO *stands sadly aside.*

DORN. What a lot of changes you have made here! You have turned this sitting-room into a library.

MASHA. Constantine likes to work in this room, because from it he can step out into the garden to meditate whenever he feels like it. [*The watchman's rattle is heard.*

SORIN. Where is my sister?

DORN. She has gone to the station to meet Trigorin. She will soon be back.

SORIN. I must be dangerously ill if you had to send for my sister. [*He falls silent for a moment*] A nice business this is!

Here I am dangerously ill, and you won't even give me any medicine.

DORN. What shall I prescribe for you? Camomile tea? Soda? Quinine?

SORIN. Don't inflict any of your discussions on me again. [*He nods toward the sofa*] Is that bed for me?

PAULINA. Yes, for you, sir.

SORIN. Thank you.

DORN. [*Sings*] "The moon swims in the sky to-night."

SORIN. I am going to give Constantine an idea for a story. It shall be called "The Man Who Wished—*L'Homme qui a voulu.*" When I was young, I wished to become an author; I failed. I wished to be an orator; I speak abominably, [*Exciting himself*] with my eternal "and all, and all," dragging each sentence on and on until I sometimes break out into a sweat all over. I wished to marry, and I didn't; I wished to live in the city, and here I am ending my days in the country, and all.

DORN. You wished to become State Councillor, and—you are one!

SORIN. [*Laughing*] I didn't try for that, it came of its own accord.

DORN. Come, you must admit that it is petty to cavil at life at sixty-two years of age.

SORIN. You are pig-headed! Can't you see I want to live?

DORN. That is futile. Nature has commanded that every life shall come to an end.

SORIN. You speak like a man who is satiated with life. Your thirst for it is quenched, and so you are calm and indifferent, but even you dread death.

DORN. The fear of death is an animal passion which must be overcome. Only those who believe in a future life and tremble for sins committed, can logically fear death; but you,

for one thing, don't believe in a future life, and for another, you haven't committed any sins. You have served as a Councillor for twenty-five years, that is all.

SORIN. [*Laughing*] Twenty-eight years!

TREPLIEFF *comes in and sits down on a stool at* SORIN'S *feet.* MASHA *fixes her eyes on his face and never once tears them away.*

DORN. We are keeping Constantine from his work.

TREPLIEFF. No matter. [*A pause.*

MEDVIEDENKO. Of all the cities you visited when you were abroad, Doctor, which one did you like the best?

DORN. Genoa.

TREPLIEFF. Why Genoa?

DORN. Because there is such a splendid crowd in its streets. When you leave the hotel in the evening, and throw yourself into the heart of that throng, and move with it without aim or object, swept along, hither and thither, their life seems to be yours, their soul flows into you, and you begin to believe at last in a great world spirit, like the one in your play that Nina Zarietchnaya acted. By the way, where is Nina now? Is she well?

TREPLIEFF. I believe so.

DORN. I hear she has led rather a strange life; what happened?

TREPLIEFF. It is a long story, Doctor.

DORN. Tell it shortly. [*A pause.*

TREPLIEFF. She ran away from home and joined Trigorin; you know that?

DORN. Yes.

TREPLIEFF. She had a child that died. Trigorin soon tired of her and returned to his former ties, as might have been expected. He had never broken them, indeed, but out of weakness of character had always vacillated between the

two. As far as I can make out from what I have heard, Nina's domestic life has not been altogether a success.

DORN. What about her acting?

TREPLIEFF. I believe she made an even worse failure of that. She made her début on the stage of the Summer Theatre in Moscow, and afterward made a tour of the country towns. At that time I never let her out of my sight, and wherever she went I followed. She always attempted great and difficult parts, but her delivery was harsh and monotonous, and her gestures heavy and crude. She shrieked and died well at times, but those were but moments.

DORN. Then she really has a talent for acting?

TREPLIEFF. I never could make out. I believe she has. I saw her, but she refused to see me, and her servant would never admit me to her rooms. I appreciated her feelings, and did not insist upon a meeting. [*A pause*] What more can I tell you? She sometimes writes to me now that I have come home, such clever, sympathetic letters, full of warm feeling. She never complains, but I can tell that she is profoundly unhappy; not a line but speaks to me of an aching, breaking nerve. She has one strange fancy; she always signs herself "The Sea-gull." The miller in "Rusalka" called himself "The Crow," and so she repeats in all her letters that she is a sea-gull. She is here now.

DORN. What do you mean by "here?"

TREPLIEFF. In the village, at the inn. She has been there for five days. I should have gone to see her, but Masha here went, and she refuses to see any one. Some one told me she had been seen wandering in the fields a mile from here yesterday evening.

MEDVIEDENKO. Yes, I saw her. She was walking away from here in the direction of the village. I asked her why she had not been to see us. She said she would come.

TREPLIEFF. But she won't. [*A pause*] Her father and stepmother have disowned her. They have even put watchmen all around their estate to keep her away. [*He goes with the doctor toward the desk*] How easy it is, Doctor, to be a philosopher on paper, and how difficult in real life!

SORIN. She was a beautiful girl. Even the State Councillor himself was in love with her for a time.

DORN. You old Lovelace, you!

SHAMRAEFF'S *laugh is heard.*

PAULINA. They are coming back from the station.

TREPLIEFF. Yes, I hear my mother's voice.

ARKADINA *and* TRIGORIN *come in, followed by* SHAMRAEFF.

SHAMRAEFF. We all grow old and wither, my lady, while you alone, with your light dress, your gay spirits, and your grace, keep the secret of eternal youth.

ARKADINA. You are still trying to turn my head, you tiresome old man.

TRIGORIN. [*To* SORIN] How do you do, Peter? What, still ill? How silly of you! [*With evident pleasure, as he catches sight of* MASHA] How are you, Miss Masha?

MASHA. So you recognised me? [*She shakes hands with him.*

TRIGORIN. Did you marry him?

MASHA. Long ago.

TRIGORIN. You are happy now? [*He bows to* DORN *and* MEDVIEDENKO, *and then goes hesitatingly toward* TREPLIEFF] Your mother says you have forgotten the past and are no longer angry with me.

TREPLIEFF *gives him his hand.*

ARKADINA. [*To her son*] Here is a magazine that Boris has brought you with your latest story in it.

TREPLIEFF. [*To* TRIGORIN, *as he takes the magazine*] Many thanks; you are very kind.

TRIGORIN. Your admirers all send you their regards. Every one in Moscow and St. Petersburg is interested in you, and all ply me with questions about you. They ask me what you look like, how old you are, whether you are fair or dark. For some reason they all think that you are no longer young, and no one knows who you are, as you always write under an assumed name. You are as great a mystery as the Man in the Iron Mask.

TREPLIEFF. Do you expect to be here long?

TRIGORIN. No, I must go back to Moscow to-morrow. I am finishing another novel, and have promised something to a magazine besides. In fact, it is the same old business.

During their conversation ARKADINA *and* PAULINA *have put up a card-table in the centre of the room;* SHAMRAEFF *lights the candles and arranges the chairs, then fetches a box of lotto from the cupboard.*

TRIGORIN. The weather has given me a rough welcome. The wind is frightful. If it goes down by morning I shall go fishing in the lake, and shall have a look at the garden and the spot—do you remember?—where your play was given. I remember the piece very well, but should like to see again where the scene was laid.

MASHA. [*To her father*] Father, do please let my husband have a horse. He ought to go home.

SHAMRAEFF. [*Angrily*] A horse to go home with! [*Sternly*] You know the horses have just been to the station. I can't send them out again.

MASHA. But there are other horses. [*Seeing that her father remains silent*] You are impossible!

MEDVIEDENKO. I shall go on foot, Masha.

PAULINA. [*With a sigh*] On foot in this weather? [*She takes a seat at the card-table*] Shall we begin?

MEDVIEDENKO. It is only six miles. Good-bye. [*He kisses his wife's hand*] Good-bye, mother. [*His mother-in-law gives him her hand unwillingly*] I should not have troubled you all, but the baby— [*He bows to every one*] Good-bye.

[*He goes out with an apologetic air.*

SHAMRAEFF. He will get there all right, he is not a major-general.

PAULINA. Come, let us begin. Don't let us waste time, we shall soon be called to supper.

SHAMRAEFF, MASHA, *and* DORN *sit down at the card-table.*

ARKADINA. [*To* TRIGORIN] When the long autumn evenings descend on us we while away the time here by playing lotto. Look at this old set; we used it when our mother played with us as children. Don't you want to take a hand in the game with us until supper time? [*She and* TRIGORIN *sit down at the table*] It is a monotonous game, but it is all right when one gets used to it.

[*She deals three cards to each of the players.*

TREPLIEFF. [*Looking through the pages of the magazine*] He has read his own story, and hasn't even cut the pages of mine.

He lays the magazine on his desk and goes toward the door on the right, stopping as he passes his mother to give her a kiss.

ARKADINA. Won't you play, Constantine?

TREPLIEFF. No, excuse me please, I don't feel like it. I am going to take a turn through the rooms. [*He goes out.*

MASHA. Are you all ready? I shall begin: twenty-two.

ARKADINA. Here it is.

MASHA. Three.

DORN. Right.

MASHA. Have you put down three? Eight. Eighty-one. Ten.

SHAMRAEFF. Don't go so fast.

ARKADINA. Could you believe it? I am still dazed by the reception they gave me in Kharkoff.

MASHA. Thirty-four.

[*The notes of a melancholy waltz are heard.*

ARKADINA. The students gave me an ovation; they sent me three baskets of flowers, a wreath, and this thing here.

She unclasps a brooch from her breast and lays it on the table.

SHAMRAEFF. There is something worth while!

MASHA. Fifty.

DORN. Fifty, did you say?

ARKADINA. I wore a perfectly magnificent dress; I am no fool when it comes to clothes.

PAULINA. Constantine is playing again; the poor boy is sad.

SHAMRAEFF. He has been severely criticised in the papers.

MASHA. Seventy-seven.

ARKADINA. They want to attract attention to him.

TRIGORIN. He doesn't seem able to make a success, he can't somehow strike the right note. There is an odd vagueness about his writings that sometimes verges on delirium. He has never created a single living character.

MASHA. Eleven.

ARKADINA. Are you bored, Peter? [*A pause*] He is asleep.

DORN. The Councillor is taking a nap.

MASHA. Seven. Ninety.

TRIGORIN. Do you think I should write if I lived in such a place as this, on the shore of this lake? Never! I should overcome my passion, and give my life up to the catching of fish.

MASHA. Twenty-eight.

TRIGORIN. And if I caught a perch or a bass, what bliss it would be!

DORN. I have great faith in Constantine. I know there is something in him. He thinks in images; his stories are vivid and full of colour, and always affect me deeply. It is only a pity that he has no definite object in view. He creates impressions, and nothing more, and one cannot go far on impressions alone. Are you glad, madam, that you have an author for a son?

ARKADINA. Just think, I have never read anything of his; I never have time.

MASHA. Twenty-six.

TREPLIEFF *comes in quietly and sits down at his table.*

SHAMRAEFF. [*To* TRIGORIN] We have something here that belongs to you, sir.

TRIGORIN. What is it?

SHAMRAEFF. You told me to have the sea-gull stuffed that Mr. Constantine killed some time ago.

TRIGORIN. Did I? [*Thoughtfully*] I don't remember.

MASHA. Sixty-one. One.

TREPLIEFF *throws open the window and stands listening.*

TREPLIEFF. How dark the night is! I wonder what makes me so restless.

ARKADINA. Shut the window, Constantine, there is a draught here.

TREPLIEFF *shuts the window.*

MASHA. Ninety-eight.

TRIGORIN. See, my card is full.

ARKADINA. [*Gaily*] Bravo! Bravo!

SHAMRAEFF. Bravo!

ARKADINA. Wherever he goes and whatever he does, that man always has good luck. [*She gets up*] And now, come to supper. Our renowned guest did not have any dinner to-day.

We can continue our game later. [*To her son*] Come, Constantine, leave your writing and come to supper.

TREPLIEFF. I don't want anything to eat, mother; I am not hungry.

ARKADINA. As you please. [*She wakes* SORIN] Come to supper, Peter. [*She takes* SHAMRAEFF'S *arm*] Let me tell you about my reception in Kharkoff.

PAULINA *blows out the candles on the table, then she and* DORN *roll* SORIN'S *chair out of the room, and all go out through the door on the left, except* TREPLIEFF, *who is left alone.* TREPLIEFF *prepares to write. He runs his eye over what he has already written.*

TREPLIEFF. I have talked a great deal about new forms of art, but I feel myself gradually slipping into the beaten track. [*He reads*] "The placard cried it from the wall—a pale face in a frame of dusky hair"—cried—frame—that is stupid. [*He scratches out what he has written*] I shall begin again from the place where my hero is wakened by the noise of the rain, but what follows must go. This description of a moonlight night is long and stilted. Trigorin has worked out a process of his own, and descriptions are easy for him. He writes that the neck of a broken bottle lying on the bank glittered in the moonlight, and that the shadows lay black under the mill-wheel. There you have a moonlight night before your eyes, but I speak of the shimmering light, the twinkling stars, the distant sounds of a piano melting into the still and scented air, and the result is abominable. [*A pause*] The conviction is gradually forcing itself upon me that good literature is not a question of forms new or old, but of ideas that must pour freely from the author's heart, without his bothering his head about any forms whatsoever. [*A knock is heard at the window nearest the table*] What was that? [*He looks out of the window*] I can't see anything. [*He opens the glass door and looks out into*

the garden] I heard some one run down the steps. [*He calls*] Who is there? [*He goes out, and is heard walking quickly along the terrace. In a few minutes he comes back with* NINA ZARIETCHNAYA] Oh, Nina, Nina!

NINA *lays her head on* TREPLIEFF'S *breast and stifles her sobs.*

TREPLIEFF. [*Deeply moved*] Nina, Nina! It is you—you! I felt you would come; all day my heart has been aching for you. [*He takes off her hat and cloak*] My darling, my beloved has come back to me! We mustn't cry, we mustn't cry.

NINA. There is some one here.

TREPLIEFF. No one is here.

NINA. Lock the door, some one might come.

TREPLIEFF. No one will come in.

NINA. I know your mother is here. Lock the door.

TREPLIEFF *locks the door on the right and comes back to* NINA.

TREPLIEFF. There is no lock on that one. I shall put a chair against it. [*He puts an arm-chair against the door*] Don't be frightened, no one shall come in.

NINA. [*Gazing intently into his face*] Let me look at you. [*She looks about her*] It is warm and comfortable in here. This used to be a sitting-room. Have I changed much?

TREPLIEFF. Yes, you have grown thinner, and your eyes are larger than they were. Nina, it seems so strange to see you! Why didn't you let me go to you? Why didn't you come sooner to me? You have been here nearly a week, I know. I have been several times each day to where you live, and have stood like a beggar beneath your window.

NINA. I was afraid you might hate me. I dream every night that you look at me without recognising me. I have been wandering about on the shores of the lake ever since

I came back. I have often been near your house, but I have never had the courage to come in. Let us sit down. [*They sit down*] Let us sit down and talk our hearts out. It is so quiet and warm in here. Do you hear the wind whistling outside? As Turgenieff says, "Happy is he who can sit at night under the roof of his home, who has a warm corner in which to take refuge." I am a sea-gull—and yet—no. [*She passes her hand across her forehead*] What was I saying? Oh, yes, Turgenieff. He says, "and God help all houseless wanderers." [*She sobs.*

TREPLIEFF. Nina! You are crying again, Nina!

NINA. It is all right. I shall feel better after this. I have not cried for two years. I went into the garden last night to see if our old theatre were still standing. I see it is. I wept there for the first time in two years, and my heart grew lighter, and my soul saw more clearly again. See, I am not crying now. [*She takes his hand in hers*] So you are an author now, and I am an actress. We have both been sucked into the whirlpool. My life used to be as happy as a child's; I used to wake singing in the morning; I loved you and dreamt of fame, and what is the reality? To-morrow morning early I must start for Eltz by train in a third-class carriage, with a lot of peasants, and at Eltz the educated trades-people will pursue me with compliments. It is a rough life.

TREPLIEFF. Why are you going to Eltz?

NINA. I have accepted an engagement there for the winter. It is time for me to go.

TREPLIEFF. Nina, I have cursed you, and hated you, and torn up your photograph, and yet I have known every minute of my life that my heart and soul were yours for ever. To cease from loving you is beyond my power. I have suffered continually from the time I lost you and began to write, and my life has been almost unendurable. My youth was sud-

denly plucked from me then, and I seem now to have lived in this world for ninety years. I have called out to you, I have kissed the ground you walked on, wherever I looked I have seen your face before my eyes, and the smile that had illumined for me the best years of my life.

NINA. [*Despairingly*] Why, why does he talk to me like this?

TREPLIEFF. I am quite alone, unwarmed by any attachment. I am as cold as if I were living in a cave. Whatever I write is dry and gloomy and harsh. Stay here, Nina, I beseech you, or else let me go away with you.

NINA *quickly puts on her coat and hat.*

TREPLIEFF. Nina, why do you do that? For God's sake, Nina! [*He watches her as she dresses. A pause.*

NINA. My carriage is at the gate. Do not come out to see me off. I shall find the way alone. [*Weeping*] Let me have some water.

TREPLIEFF *hands her a glass of water.*

TREPLIEFF. Where are you going?

NINA. Back to the village. Is your mother here?

TREPLIEFF. Yes, my uncle fell ill on Thursday, and we telegraphed for her to come.

NINA. Why do you say that you have kissed the ground I walked on? You should kill me rather. [*She bends over the table*] I am so tired. If I could only rest—rest. [*She raises her head*] I am a sea-gull—no—no, I am an actress. [*She hears* ARKADINA *and* TRIGORIN *laughing in the distance, runs to the door on the left and looks through the keyhole*] He is there too. [*She goes back to* TREPLIEFF] Ah, well—no matter. He does not believe in the theatre; he used to laugh at my dreams, so that little by little I became down-hearted and ceased to believe in it too. Then came all the cares of love, the con-

tinual anxiety about my little one, so that I soon grew trivial and spiritless, and played my parts without meaning. I never knew what to do with my hands, and I could not walk properly or control my voice. You cannot imagine the state of mind of one who knows as he goes through a play how terribly badly he is acting. I am a sea-gull —no—no, that is not what I meant to say. Do you remember how you shot a sea-gull once? A man chanced to pass that way and destroyed it out of idleness. That is an idea for a short story, but it is not what I meant to say. [*She passes her hand across her forehead*] What was I saying? Oh, yes, the stage. I have changed now. Now I am a real actress. I act with joy. with exaltation, I am intoxicated by it, and feel that I am superb. I have been walking and walking, and thinking and thinking, ever since I have been here, and I feel the strength of my spirit growing in me every day. I know now, I understand at last, Constantine, that for us, whether we write or act, it is not the honour and glory of which I have dreamt that is important, it is the strength to endure. One must know how to bear one's cross, and one must have faith. I believe, and so do not suffer so much, and when I think of my calling I do not fear life.

TREPLIEFF. [*Sadly*] You have found your way, you know where you are going, but I am still groping in a chaos of phantoms and dreams, not knowing whom and what end I am serving by it all. I do not believe in anything, and I do not know what my calling is.

NINA. [*Listening*] Hush! I must go. Good-bye. When I have become a famous actress you must come and see me. Will you promise to come? But now—[*She takes his hand*] it is late. I can hardly stand. I am fainting. I am hungry.

TREPLIEFF. Stay, and let me bring you some supper.

NINA. No, no—and don't come out, I can find the way

alone. My carriage is not far away. So she brought him back with her? However, what difference can that make to me? Don't tell Trigorin anything when you see him. I love him—I love him even more than I used to. It is an idea for a short story. I love him—I love him passionately—I love him to despair. Have you forgotten, Constantine, how pleasant the old times were? What a gay, bright, gentle, pure life we led? How a feeling as sweet and tender as a flower blossomed in our hearts? Do you remember, [*She recites*] "All men and beasts, lions, eagles, and quails, horned stags, geese, spiders, silent fish that inhabit the waves, starfish from the sea, and creatures invisible to the eye—in one word, life—all, all life, completing the dreary round set before it, has died out at last. A thousand years have passed since the earth last bore a living creature on its breast, and the unhappy moon now lights her lamp in vain. No longer are the cries of storks heard in the meadows, or the drone of beetles in the groves of limes——"

She embraces TREPLIEFF *impetuously and runs out onto the terrace.*

TREPLIEFF. [*After a pause*] It would be a pity if she were seen in the garden. My mother would be distressed.

He stands for several minutes tearing up his manuscripts and throwing them under the table, then unlocks the door on the right and goes out.

DORN. [*Trying to force open the door on the left*] Odd! This door seems to be locked. [*He comes in and puts the chair back in its former place*] This is like a hurdle race.

ARKADINA *and* PAULINA *come in, followed by* JACOB *carrying some bottles; then come* MASHA, SHAMRAEFF, *and* TRIGORIN.

ARKADINA. Put the claret and the beer here, on the

table, so that we can drink while we are playing. Sit down, friends.

PAULINA. And bring the tea at once.

She lights the candles and takes her seat at the card-table.

SHAMRAEFF *leads* TRIGORIN *to the cupboard.*

SHAMRAEFF. Here is the stuffed sea-gull I was telling you about. [*He takes the sea-gull out of the cupboard*] You told me to have it done.

TRIGORIN. [*Looking at the bird*] I don't remember a thing about it, not a thing. [*A shot is heard. Every one jumps.*

ARKADINA. [*Frightened*] What was that?

DORN. Nothing at all; probably one of my medicine bottles has blown up. Don't worry. [*He goes out through the door on the right, and comes back in a few moments*] It is as I thought, a flask of ether has exploded. [*He sings*]

"Spellbound once more I stand before thee."

ARKADINA. [*Sitting down at the table*] Heavens! I was really frightened. That noise reminded me of— [*She covers her face with her hands*] Everything is black before my eyes.

DORN. [*Looking through the pages of a magazine, to* TRIGORIN] There was an article from America in this magazine about two months ago that I wanted to ask you about, among other things. [*He leads* TRIGORIN *to the front of the stage*] I am very much interested in this question. [*He lowers his voice and whispers*] You must take Madame Arkadina away from here; what I wanted to say was, that Constantine has shot himself.

The curtain falls.

THE SWAN SONG

CHARACTERS

Vasili Svietlovidoff, *a comedian*, 68 *years old*
Nikita Ivanitch, *a prompter, an old man*

THE SWAN SONG

The scene is laid on the stage of a country theatre, at night, after the play. To the right a row of rough, unpainted doors leading into the dressing-rooms. To the left and in the background the stage is encumbered with all sorts of rubbish. In the middle of the stage is an overturned stool.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. [*With a candle in his hand, comes out of a dressing-room and laughs*] Well, well, this is funny! Here's a good joke! I fell asleep in my dressing-room when the play was over, and there I was calmly snoring after everybody else had left the theatre. Ah! I'm a foolish old man, a poor old dodderer! I have been drinking again, and so I fell asleep in there, sitting up. That was clever! Good for you, old boy! [*Calls*] Yegorka! Petrushka! Where the devil are you? Petrushka! The scoundrels must be asleep, and an earthquake wouldn't wake them now! Yegorka! [*Picks up the stool, sits down, and puts the candle on the floor*] Not a sound! Only echos answer me. I gave Yegorka and Petrushka each a tip to-day, and now they have disappeared without leaving a trace behind them. The rascals have gone off and have probably locked up the theatre. [*Turns his head about*] I'm drunk! Ugh! The play to-night was for my benefit, and it is disgusting to think how much beer and wine I have poured down my throat in honour of the occasion. Gracious! My body is burning all over, and I feel as if I had twenty tongues in my mouth. It is horrid! Idiotic! This poor old sinner is

drunk again, and doesn't even know what he has been celebrating! Ugh! My head is splitting, I am shivering all over, and I feel as dark and cold inside as a cellar! Even if I don't mind ruining my health, I ought at least to remember my age, old idiot that I am! Yes, my old age! It's no use! I can play the fool, and brag, and pretend to be young, but my life is really over now, I kiss my hand to the sixty-eight years that have gone by; I'll never see them again! I have drained the bottle, only a few little drops are left at the bottom, nothing but the dregs. Yes, yes, that's the case, Vasili, old boy. The time has come for you to rehearse the part of a mummy, whether you like it or not. Death is on its way to you. [*Stares ahead of him*] It is strange, though, that I have been on the stage now for forty-five years, and this is the first time I have seen a theatre at night, after the lights have been put out. The first time. [*Walks up to the foot-lights*] How dark it is! I can't see a thing. Oh, yes, I can just make out the prompter's box, and his desk; the rest is in pitch darkness, a black, bottomless pit, like a grave, in which death itself might be hiding. . . . Brr. . . . How cold it is! The wind blows out of the empty theatre as though out of a stone flue. What a place for ghosts! The shivers are running up and down my back. [*Calls*] Yegorka! Petrushka! Where are you both? What on earth makes me think of such gruesome things here? I must give up drinking; I'm an old man, I shan't live much longer. At sixty-eight people go to church and prepare for death, but here I am—heavens! A profane old drunkard in this fool's dress—I'm simply not fit to look at. I must go and change it at once. . . . This is a dreadful place, I should die of fright sitting here all night. [*Goes toward his dressing-room; at the same time* NIKITA IVANITCH *in a long white coat comes out of the dressing-room at the farthest end of the stage.* SVIETLOVIDOFF *sees* IVANITCH—

shrieks with terror and steps back] Who are you? What? What do you want? [*Stamps his foot*] Who are you?

IVANITCH. It is I, sir.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. Who are you?

IVANITCH. [*Comes slowly toward him*] It is I, sir, the prompter, Nikita Ivanitch. It is I, master, it is I!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. [*Sinks helplessly onto the stool, breathes heavily and trembles violently*] Heavens! Who are you? It is you . . . you Nikitushka? What . . . what are you doing here?

IVANITCH. I spend my nights here in the dressing-rooms. Only please be good enough not to tell Alexi Fomitch, sir. I have nowhere else to spend the night; indeed, I haven't.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. Ah! It is you, Nikitushka, is it? Just think, the audience called me out sixteen times; they brought me three wreathes and lots of other things, too; they were all wild with enthusiasm, and yet not a soul came when it was all over to wake the poor, drunken old man and take him home. And I am an old man, Nikitushka! I am sixty-eight years old, and I am ill. I haven't the heart left to go on. [*Falls on* IVANITCH'S *neck and weeps*] Don't go away, Nikitushka; I am old and helpless, and I feel it is time for me to die. Oh, it is dreadful, dreadful!

IVANITCH. [*Tenderly and respectfully*] Dear master! it is time for you to go home, sir!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I won't go home; I have no home—none! none!—none!

IVANITCH. Oh, dear! Have you forgotten where you live?

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I won't go there. I won't! I am all alone there. I have nobody, Nikitushka! No wife—no children. I am like the wind blowing across the lonely fields. I shall die, and no one will remember me. It is awful to be alone

—no one to cheer me, no one to caress me, no one to help me to bed when I am drunk. Whom do I belong to? Who needs me? Who loves me? Not a soul, Nikitushka.

IVANITCH. [*Weeping*] Your audience loves you, master.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. My audience has gone home. They are all asleep, and have forgotten their old clown. No, nobody needs me, nobody loves me; I have no wife, no children.

IVANITCH. Oh, dear, Oh, dear! Don't be so unhappy about it.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. But I am a man, I am still alive. Warm, red blood is tingling in my veins, the blood of noble ancestors. I am an aristocrat, Nikitushka; I served in the army, in the artillery, before I fell as low as this, and what a fine young chap I was! Handsome, daring, eager! Where has it all gone? What has become of those old days? There's the pit that has swallowed them all! I remember it all now. Forty-five years of my life lie buried there, and what a life, Nikitushka! I can see it as clearly as I see your face: the ecstasy of youth, faith, passion, the love of women—women, Nikitushka!

IVANITCH. It is time you went to sleep, sir.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. When I first went on the stage, in the first glow of passionate youth, I remember a woman loved me for my acting. She was beautiful, graceful as a poplar, young, innocent, pure, and radiant as a summer dawn. Her smile could charm away the darkest night. I remember, I stood before her once, as I am now standing before you. She had never seemed so lovely to me as she did then, and she spoke to me so with her eyes—such a look! I shall never forget it, no, not even in the grave; so tender, so soft, so deep, so bright and young! Enraptured, intoxicated, I fell on my knees before her, I begged for my happiness, and she said: "Give up the stage!" Give up the stage! Do you understand? She could love an actor, but marry him—never! I was act-

ing that day, I remember—I had a foolish, clown's part, and as I acted, I felt my eyes being opened; I saw that the worship of the art I had held so sacred was a delusion and an empty dream; that I was a slave, a fool, the plaything of the idleness of strangers. I understood my audience at last, and since that day I have not believed in their applause, or in their wreathes, or in their enthusiasm. Yes, Nikitushka! The people applaud me, they buy my photograph, but I am a stranger to them. They don't know me, I am as the dirt beneath their feet. They are willing enough to meet me . . . but allow a daughter or a sister to marry me, an outcast, never! I have no faith in them, [*sinks onto the stool*] no faith in them.

IVANITCH. Oh, sir! you look dreadfully pale, you frighten me to death! Come, go home, have mercy on me!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. I saw through it all that day, and the knowledge was dearly bought. Nikitushka! After that . . . when that girl . . . well, I began to wander aimlessly about, living from day to day without looking ahead. I took the parts of buffoons and low comedians, letting my mind go to wreck. Ah! but I was a great artist once, till little by little I threw away my talents, played the motley fool, lost my looks, lost the power of expressing myself, and became in the end a Merry Andrew instead of a man. I have been swallowed up in that great black pit. I never felt it before, but to-night, when I woke up, I looked back, and there behind me lay sixty-eight years. I have just found out what it is to be old! It is all over . . . [*sobs*] . . . all over.

IVANITCH. There, there, dear master! Be quiet . . . gracious! [*Calls*] Petrushka! Yegorka!

SVIETLOVIDOFF. But what a genius I was! You cannot imagine what power I had, what eloquence; how graceful I was, how tender; how many strings [*beats his breast*] quivered

in this breast! It chokes me to think of it! Listen now, wait, let me catch my breath, there; now listen to this:

"The shade of bloody Ivan now returning
Fans through my lips rebellion to a flame,
I am the dead Dimitri! In the burning
Boris shall perish on the throne I claim.
Enough! The heir of Czars shall not be seen
Kneeling to yonder haughty Polish Queen!"*

Is that bad, eh? [*Quickly*] Wait, now, here's something from King Lear. The sky is black, see? Rain is pouring down, thunder roars, lightning—zzz zzz zzz—splits the whole sky, and then, listen:

"Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulphurous thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
That make ungrateful man!"

[*Impatiently*] Now, the part of the fool. [*Stamps his foot*] Come take the fool's part! Be quick, I can't wait!

IVANITCH. [*Takes the part of the fool*]

"O, Nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o' door. Good Nuncle, in; ask thy daughter's blessing: here's a night pities neither wise men nor fools."

* From "Boris Godunoff," by Pushkin.

SVIETLOVIDOFF.

"Rumble thy bellyful! spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters;
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children."

Ah! there is strength, there is talent for you! I'm a great artist! Now, then, here's something else of the same kind, to bring back my youth to me. For instance, take this, from Hamlet, I'll begin . . . let me see, how does it go? Oh, yes, this is it. [*Takes the part of Hamlet*]

"O! the recorders, let me see one.—To withdraw with you. Why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?"

IVANITCH. "O, my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?"

IVANITCH. "My lord, I cannot."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I pray you."

IVANITCH. "Believe me, I cannot."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "I do beseech you."

IVANITCH. "I know no touch of it, my lord."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "'Tis as easy as lying: govern these ventages with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops."

IVANITCH. "But these I cannot command to any utterance of harmony: I have not the skill."

SVIETLOVIDOFF. "Why, look you, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me; you would seem

to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. S'blood! Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me!" [*Laughs and clasps*] Bravo! Encore! Bravo! Where the devil is there any old age in that? I'm not old, that is all nonsense, a torrent of strength rushes over me; this is life, freshness, youth! Old age and genius can't exist together. You seem to be struck dumb, Nikitushka. Wait a second, let me come to my senses again. Oh! Good Lord! Now then, listen! Did you ever hear such tenderness, such music? Sh! Softly;

"The moon had set. There was not any light,
Save of the lonely legion'd watch-stars pale
In outer air, and what by fits made bright
Hot oleanders in a rosy vale
Searched by the lamping fly, whose little spark
Went in and out, like passion's bashful hope."

[*The noise of opening doors is heard*] What's that?

IVANITCH. There are Petrushka and Yegorka coming back. Yes, you have genius, genius, my master.

SVIETLOVIDOFF. [*Calls, turning toward the noise*] Come here to me, boys! [*To* IVANITCH] Let us go and get dressed. I'm not old! All that is foolishness, nonsense! [*Laughs gaily*] What are you crying for? You poor old granny, you, what's the matter now? This won't do! There, there, this won't do at all! Come, come, old man, don't stare so! What makes you stare like that? There, there! [*Embraces him in tears*] Don't cry! Where there is art and genius there can

never be such things as old age or loneliness or sickness . . . and death itself is half . . . [*Weeps*] No, no, Nikitushka! It is all over for us now! What sort of a genius am I? I'm like a squeezed lemon, a cracked bottle, and you—you are the old rat of the theatre . . . a prompter! Come on! [*They go*] I'm no genius, I'm only fit to be in the suite of Fortinbras, and even for that I am too old. . . . Yes. . . . Do you remember those lines from Othello, Nikitushka?

"Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troops and the big wars
That make ambition virtue! O farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!"

IVANITCH. Oh! You're a genius, a genius!
SVIETLOVIDOFF. And again this:

"Away! the moor is dark beneath the moon,
Rapid clouds have drunk the last pale beam of even:
Away! the gathering winds will call the darkness soon,
And profoundest midnight shroud the serene lights of heaven."

They go out together, the curtain falls slowly.